

Waffe des Mannes in Stein's  
J. H. Darby

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE THEOLOGY  
OF J.N. DARBY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE  
PLYMOUTH BRETHREN  
MOVEMENT

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by  
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To my wife, Doris,  
to whose unselfish devotion and abiding loyalty  
this thesis is dedicated.

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## INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century was a distinct starting-point for three influential developments of religious opinions in Britain. It was then that John H. Newman, Edward Pusey, and John Keble were preparing the Anglo-Catholic reactions in the heart of Protestantism which later issued in the disturbing effects of the Ritualistic movement and in the revived energy of English Romanism.<sup>1</sup> About the same time the Broad, or High, Church movement was slowly, though obscurely taking shape. However, almost unnoticed by the world, there sprang up by their side, simultaneously in England and Ireland, a pre-eminently spiritual movement which resulted in the rejection of all ecclesiastical form and denominational distinction.<sup>2</sup>

Certain similarities of decline in the historical development of these systems are interesting to note. The first movement culminated in widespread return to Romanism; the second ripened more slowly into the rationalism of "Essays and Reviews;" and the third, which offered itself as a refuge of fellowship to Christians amidst the formalism and decay of the churches, underwent a period of intense controversy and decline before reaching a level of stability.

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<sup>1</sup>R.D. Middleton, Newman at Oxford: His Religious Development (London: Oxford University Press, 1950); Walter Mayers, Correspondence of John Henry Newman with John Keble and Others (London: Oxford University Press, 1859-45).

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Croskery, Plymouth-Brethrenism (London: William Mullar & Son, 1879), p. v.



While its influence is not as strongly felt today as it was in the middle of the last century, whatever element of spiritual truth its doctrine may have contained is still valid, and bears a similar message for the ecclesiastical world of today. It is the purpose of this dissertation to determine what that message is.

The author's first introduction to Brethrenism<sup>1</sup> came through friends and as such carried with it an invitation to fellowship. As an ordained Baptist minister, his reaction was difficult to describe. Its doctrines were novel and interesting; its practices unusual and at times perplexing; its attitude toward other Christians difficult to understand; and its seemingly exclusive possession of true doctrine not readily acceptable. However, its atmosphere of deep spirituality was unmistakably genuine, and it is this that impressed him most. The spirit of fellowship; the aroma of true Christian brotherhood; the exuberance of a spirit of personal Christ-likeness; the extensive knowledge of the Bible; the abandonment of selfish interest to the common cause of the "community of Christ" -- all these seemed to reflect the ideal assembly of God's people.

Examination of the doctrine and practices of the Brethren led to a deep interest in the movement. Although the author could not concur with all of its interpretations, he realized that the basic truth of Brethrenism -- the true nature, unity, and purpose of the church -- is one that

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<sup>1</sup>The author is fully mindful of, and sympathetic to, the desire of the group commonly designated as "the Brethren" to abstain from any appellation or description, and to be known simply as Christians. For the sake of clarity, however, he adopts the usage of "Plymouth Brethren" to avoid the pitfall of ambiguity. By so doing he does not consciously attribute a denominational status to the Brethren, nor does he deny them the prerogative to assemble simply "in His name."

needs no less emphasis today than when the movement started.

The author frankly admits a sympathetic admiration for the spiritual atmosphere of the Brethren, but maintains a critical wariness as to some of its interpretation of Scripture which leads to what he believes to be, in part, an abstract idealism of doctrine and practice.

The purpose of this dissertation is not to examine, re-state or evaluate the basic tenets of Brethrenism, but confines itself to an examination of the doctrine of the Church as set forth in the theology of J.N. Darby, the chief promulgator of its doctrines. The author has no polemic or apologetic motives; he is not in an argumentative mood. The primary motivation is intellectual interest to examine what has produced this atmosphere of Brethrenism.

The author views his task as three-fold: to state the doctrine, evaluate its consistency within its own system, and, to determine its contribution to the Brethren movement. He does not propose either to defend or criticize Darby's doctrine, but merely to isolate it from the other Brethren authors and to state it clearly and concisely. The need for such a re-statement may be determined by even a casual examination of the literature on the subject. The author knows of few books or pamphlets which deal with the doctrinal aspect of Darby's work in a fair, unbiased and representative manner,<sup>1</sup> and of no book which deals with the complete doctrine in a systematic pattern. The usual method adopted by most writers

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<sup>1</sup>W. Blair Neatby, A History of the Plymouth Brethren (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), p. 229, aptly describes the situation when he writes, "The writers that have made this subject their special province are generally extremely untrustworthy. They are commonly passionately prejudiced against the Brethren. For the most part they make the writings of altogether unrepresentative men the basis of their attack, and even these men have been misrepresented."



on this subject is that of ridicule or scorn, selecting isolated tendencies which are at a tangent with the majority of theological writers, instead of presenting a comprehensive view of the entire doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis is divided into three major divisions: biographical and historical; theological analysis; and an evaluation of the contributions of Darby to the rise of Brethrenism.

In the historical section, the author does not propose to present a complete chronicle of the movement, giving all the aspects of the controversies and divisions that have occurred, since such a detailed record is not essential to the background of this thesis.<sup>2</sup> The history of Brethrenism will be considered only as it is related to the active participation of Darby. The details of this participation are not to be exhaustively narrated, for they are to be confined only to that aspect of Darby's activities that influenced the trend of Brethrenism.

Due to the almost non-existence of primary materials the author has had to depend largely upon secondary material for the facts upon which the historical chapters are based. Most of the primary materials were originally written as paper-backed pamphlets and, as a result of use and wear, have passed from existence. The only known collection of these

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<sup>1</sup>The author is aware of such works as those of S.P. Tregelles, Three Letters to the Author of 'A Retrospect of Events that Have Taken Place Amongst the Brethren' (London: Houlston & Son, 1894, 2nd. Ed.) and Five Letters (London: Houlston and Wright, 1864), but maintains that these are fragmentary by their very nature and therefore not a systematic presentation of the whole doctrine.

<sup>2</sup>For a list of books dealing with the historical development of Brethrenism the reader is referred the "Historical and Background" division of the Bibliography of this dissertation.



primary materials, with many publication plates, was destroyed by bombings during the last war, and they remain only in isolated instances in the hands of private collectors throughout the country. Extensive contact, by travel, conference, and post, has resulted in unearthing only a few of these pamphlets.<sup>1</sup> The author has attempted, by comparison and contrast, to select from the secondary materials that which seems to approximate a reconstruction of the original incidents. While error as to specific detail may be found, he feels that in the main, the ensuing historical chapters may be regarded as reliable accounts of the major trends operating within Brethrenism.

In the analytical section the author has attempted to be selective, instead of comprehensive, in presenting the material; attempting to select what is distinctively different in the system of Darby, and to leave untouched the areas in which he agrees in the main with the whole body of Reformed theology. To this extent the reader should not expect a statement of the doctrine in the usual style, nor should he expect to find an exhaustive statement of all Darby believed on the subject. The organization of the doctrine is necessarily limited by the content of Darby's statement of his beliefs since there are many areas of the doctrine -- areas usually regarded as necessary for a complete statement of the doctrine -- which Darby leaves untouched.

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<sup>1</sup>One of the real tragedies of the Brethren era has been the destruction of several boxes of out-of-print pamphlets and tracts, unpublished letters, original notes and manuscripts used by W. Blair Neatby in his History of the Plymouth Brethren. Correspondence with the Rev. George Wigram Neatby of Blackpool and Miss Helen Neatby of Uganda, brother and daughter of Neatby, reveals this to be the fate of the primary materials he used.

Literature for this second division is based almost wholly on the primary works of J.N. Darby, consisting of The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby, 32 vols.; Letters of J.N.D., 3 vols.; Synopsis of the Bible, 5 vols; articles from The Christian Witness and Bible Treasury, 1836-1881; and assorted tracts which do not appear in the Collected Writings -- all of which the author has read. Supplementary materials are duly noted in the footnotes.

The large amount of material relegated to the footnotes has been by deliberate design. The author has felt it best to keep the body of the thesis simple and readable, uncluttered by technical data that does not relate directly to the subject. However, he has felt constrained to include much supplementary information, particularly in the historical section, and this has been subordinated to the footnotes. While this may make the thesis cumbersome at times, it will add to its value as a guide both to the brief sketch of the rise of Brethrenism and to Darby's doctrine of the Church. The synthesis of Darby's doctrine has been extensively footnoted both for its authoritarian value and as an aid to assist the reader in further study on the subject.

Full bibliographical data are given in each chapter at the first reference of each book cited. Reference from the Collected Writings are abbreviated as "Col. Writ." Long and complex titles, cited in full at the first reference in each chapter, are shortened by the use of ellipses.

A note of warning must be sounded: this is not a survey of the Brethren doctrine or practice in its contemporary form. It does not necessarily follow that everything Darby believed is now embodied by the Brethren, nor that every doctrine touched in this study will find a counterpart in current Brethren doctrine since recent trends of modera-



tism have somewhat modified some of Darby's extremes. At the same time, this study may be regarded as a reliable statement of the general doctrine and practices of Brethrenism as they were expressed in the time of Darby's ascendancy and as they form the basis of Brethrenism today. ✕

The purpose and limitation of this thesis should be reiterated. The author desires only to state the distinctive doctrines of Darby concerning the Church in such a way that the reader who wishes to know exactly what he believed, without the extraneous additions of later Brethren writers, will find it in clear and concise form. He does not propose to justify these doctrines, nor to condemn them, but merely to state them so that the force of the doctrines may be applicable to whatever need of them exists today, and to show the contribution which they have made to Brethrenism.

Mindful of certain differences in grammar and spelling between the British and American usage of the language, the author has depended heavily on the guidance of the official publication of the British Treasury for grammatical constructions /Sir Ernest Gowers, Plain Words, A Guide to the Use of English (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 14th. printing, 1948)/, but has elected to follow American spelling and usage of vocabulary, by which he has felt he could more adequately express himself.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to Professor F.F. Bruce, Department of Biblical Literature, University of Sheffield, and to Geoffrey Williams, Esq., of the Evangelical Library, London, for very valuable aid in obtaining primary materials; to the officials and staff of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; New College Library,

Edinburgh; the Scottish Central Library, Dunfermline; the Edinburgh Public Library, Edinburgh; the British Museum Library, London; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; and the Middlesborough Public Library, Middlesborough, for their assistance in the location and use of materials contained in this study; and to the Rev. Principal Charles Duthie, D.D., of the Scottish Congregational Seminary and the Post-Graduate School of Theology, New College, University of Edinburgh, for his kind and helpful counsel.



## CHAPTER I

### J.N. DARBY: AN ESTIMATE OF THE MAN

There is something exceedingly fascinating to the minds of a certain cast in a system which repudiates all ecclesiastical pretension, and proposes to merge all sectarian distinctions in a simple gathering of all believers to Christ. Its attractiveness is greatly enhanced if it has an aspect of marked Biblical simplicity, together with an equally marked aversion to theological systems and its disciples are distinguished by humility, sanctity and zeal. If, moreover, it presumes to supply the latest results of a thoroughly spiritual insight into Scriptures, in an age ready to welcome any means of establishing a recovered harmony between the spirit of the Reformation symbols and the genius of modern free inquiry, it will be sure to challenge a wide and commanding acceptance.<sup>1</sup>

In the early nineteenth century the Brethren movement, known popularly as 'Plymouth Brethrenism,' made such an appeal to large numbers, not only in the environs of its origin - Ireland and England - but throughout Europe, the North American continent, and Australia.

Credit for the impetus of such a movement is due largely to the efforts of John Nelson Darby, who, though not the founder, ~~became~~ the prime mover in coordinating and propagating its doctrines. No examination of the movement in its total aspect can disregard the influences of this man, nor can such influences be adequately evaluated without a study of

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<sup>1</sup>G.T. Stokes, Plymouth Brethrenism: Its Ecclesiastical and Doctrinal Teachings; with a Sketch of Its History (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1874, Third thousand), p. 3. Reprinted from British Quarterly, Oct. 1873.

the history, character and personality-traits of his life.

The known facts about Darby's birth and early life establish his parentage as "a highly honorable family,"<sup>1</sup> his uncle being Admiral Darby, of Nile celebrity.<sup>2</sup> Born of Irish parents in London, November, 1800, his early years were spent in Ireland, where he attended Westminster School. At the age of fifteen, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, as a fellow-commoner and graduated as a Classical Gold Medalist in the summer of 1819,<sup>3</sup> when little more than eighteen years of age.

After graduation he entered the legal profession and was called to the Irish Chancery Bar in 1822, being associated with his brother-in-law, who later became the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland. All records extant indicate his natural abilities to have been such as to have assured him a brilliant career in this profession. His subsequent conversion, however, caused him to abandon the profession after one year, and in 1825 he was ordained a deacon in the Church of England by Archbishop Magee of Dublin, and was appointed to the cure of a large and struggling parish, Enniskerry,<sup>4</sup> in County Wicklow.<sup>5</sup>

The success of his labors there can be measured by the testimony of those acquainted with his ministry. He threw himself into his work with

<sup>1</sup>W. Blair Neatby, A History of the Plymouth Brethren (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Crookery, "John Nelson Darby," The Catholic Presbyterian (London: James Nisbet & Co.), Vol. VII, June, 1882, p. 441.

<sup>3</sup>Hy Pickering, Chief Men Among the Brethren (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1913), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>W.G. Turner, John Nelson Darby, A Biography (London: C.A. Hammond, 1926), p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Henry Groves, Memoire of Lord Congleton (London: John F. Shaw & Co., 1884), p. 13.



a compassion and abandonment of self, which he later exhibited in the Brethren movement, as is evident from the testimony of Prof. Francis W. Newman.

He took orders and became an indefatigable curate in the mountains of Wicklow. Every evening he sallied forth to teach in the cabins, and roving far and wide over mountains and amid bogs, was seldom home before midnight. By such exertion, his strength was undermined; he suffered in his limbs that not lameness only, but yet more serious results were feared. He did not fast on purpose . . . but his long walks through wild country and amongst indigent people inflicted on him such a severe privation; moreover, as he ate whatever food offered itself, food unpalatable and often indigestible to him, his whole frame might have vied in emaciation with a monk of La Trappe . . . . The stamp of heaven seemed . . . clear, in a frame so wasted by austerity, so superior to worldly pomp, and so partaking of all their indigencies. That a dozen such men would have done more to convert all Ireland to Protestantism, than the whole apparatus of the Church Establishment, was ere long my conviction . . . .<sup>1</sup>

A tremendous spiritual awakening attended his efforts, especially among the Roman Catholics with whom he worked. By his own statement Catholics were "becoming Protestants at the rate of 600 to 800 a week."<sup>2</sup> Such remarkable results is indicative of the fervent passion and sincerity with which Darby labored. This is all the more remarkable since it was achieved in the duration of one year's ministry, for, the following year he appeared before Archbishop Magee to be formally ordained as a minister.

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<sup>1</sup>Francis W. Newman, Phases of Faith, or, Passages from the History of My Creed (London: John Chapman, 1850), p. 28. While Newman refers to the person he describes as "The Irish Clergyman," and never calls him by name, it is clear from association of fact that he refers to Darby.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, as quoted by Neatby, Ibid., p. 16; J.N. Darby, Disendowment - Disestablishment: A Word to the Protestants of Ireland, in a Letter to the Venerable Archdeacon Stopford, The Collected Writings of J.N. Darby (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), Ecclesiastical Vol. IV, p. 437, where he undoubtedly refers to this as "many hundreds in the week."

While he was in Dublin for ordination, the Archbishop issued a decree which was subsequently to change the life of Darby, and lead him from the Church of England.

The Archbishop delivered a charge, and the clergy published a declaration addressed to Parliament denouncing the Roman Catholic Church, and claiming special favor and protection for themselves on avowedly Erastian principles. They based their demands simply on the ground that Romanism was opposed to the State, while their own system was allied with, if not subservient to, it.<sup>1</sup>

Darby's mind revolted against such a low conception of the Church and he privately circulated a tract denouncing the move as unscriptural, but the petition was of no avail. He returned to his curacy bitterly disillusioned, for the demand that all converts to the church must swear allegiance to the king was inherent in the decree. This was unthinkable to Darby's mind since it not only seemed to be a mere transference of allegiance from the Pope to the King, but prevented the convert from fully realizing his responsibility of obedience to Christ.

After the decree his outstanding success with Catholics ceased almost immediately. He retired to a prayerful study of the position of the church in world affairs, and in 1829 published a pamphlet entitled, Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ, which has been called "the Brethren's first pamphlet."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>G.T. Stokes, "J.N. Darby," Contemporary Review (London: Isbister & Co.), October, 1885, Vol. 48, p. 558.

<sup>2</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 18, on which he comments, "It was the expression of a tendency which, though rapidly coming to a head, was yet only a tendency . . . . The tract contains some forcible passages and attacks the existing order with a good deal of power; but it is strikingly lacking in definiteness of suggestion, and is plainly either the writing of a man who does not see his way clearly, or who deliberately prefers to keep his own counsel."



In the interval between 1826, when the decree was first issued, and 1828, when he published his first tract, Darby passed through a period of deep study and earnest reflection. Qualms and increasingly serious doubts which had perturbed him before now clamoured for a decision. He would not disobey the diocesan, but believed it to be a dishonor to the Christian ministry.

After the failure of his protest against the decree, and consistent with his changing concepts, he looked for some body which might satisfy his aspirations for a spiritual communion on scriptural principles, not just political expediency, and soon found it in a group of men who met together for mutual edification through prayer and Bible study. During the winter of 1827 - 28 he met regularly with these friends,<sup>1</sup> and it was this group, which, under his leadership, was destined to become the Brethren movement.<sup>2</sup>

#### AN ESTIMATE OF THE MAN

Any estimate of Darby -- as a man, author-scholar, and religious leader -- must inevitably involve contradictions and contrasts, since many of his personality traits were diametrically opposed to each other. Simple in taste, benevolent in disposition, kind in temperament, considerate in his awareness of others, humble in spirit, sympathetic in nature, he was at the same time ruthless in controversy, belligerent to

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to suggest that Darby had broken with the Church of England at this time. The cause of the break, and the subsequent rise of the Brethren group are discussed in the next chapter of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup>Stokes, op. cit., p. 538.

those who opposed him, jealous of his position of authority, and exacting in his demands. Every attempt to evaluate him must always hold these two aspects of his character in contradistinction. At the same time, no estimate of the man will be an honest one if it does not attempt to find a common ground of agreement between these two conflicting areas of his life.

The one single factor which motivated his entire life was his love for Christ. If any principle is sufficient to explain the multiple facets of his personality it is most probable that it is this love. It produced in him the type of life that has been called "a saint of the highest and purest stamp."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, this love for Christ caused him to strike relentlessly against any whom he thought to be subverting the truth of Christ's gospel, at times at close friends of many years acquaintance.

Few men have ever given such a complete abandonment of self to the cause of Christ as did Darby. From the time he renounced a promising career in law to give himself without reservation to the work of Christ, his life was marked by self-denial. Sacrificing the delight of marriage and family life that he might not be distracted from his work, he displayed in his whole conduct, in a day in which the philosophy of materialism was rampant, a simplicity and frugality typical of the early saints.

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<sup>1</sup>Editor of Southern Review, as quoted by W.G. Turner, John Nelson Darby (London: O.A. Hammond, 1951), p. 67. The reader will note that, while the titles are similar, this volume is different from John Nelson Darby, a Biography (1926) by the same author and publisher, and was first published in 1944. While the two books contain much material which is identical even to the phrasing, the later volume provides much added material.



A portrait of the man, resulting primarily from this disregard for self, describes him thus:

His bodily presence was indeed 'weak.' A fallen cheek, a blood-shot eye, crippled limb resting on crutch, a seldom shaved beard, a shabby suit of clothes, and a generally neglected person, drew at first pity, with wonder to see such a figure in a drawing room . . . . With keen logical powers, he had warm sympathy, solid judgement of character, thoughtful tenderness, and total self-abandonment.<sup>1</sup>

He had practically no thought for his own comfort, content to receive what was given him; asking for no more. He preferred being with the poor, for he was essentially humble in spirit. This characteristic endeared him to the folk of low and humble status, and was perhaps one of the secrets of his success with the poor Romanists of Ireland and the peasants of France and Switzerland.

In middle life he trudged on foot through a large part of France and Switzerland, sometimes refreshing himself on the way with scorns, at other times thankful to have an egg for his dinner . . . . In his own house, all was simplicity and self-denial.

. . . . .  
Thoughtful for others, he was indifferent as to comforts for himself . . . . his clothes were plain, and he wore them to shabbiness, though punctiliously clean in his person. In Limerick once, kind friends took advantage of his sleep to replace the old with new, which he put on without a word.<sup>2</sup>

His total self-abandonment, ever motivated by his love for Christ and delight in His service, resulted in a deep devotion to the cause to which he gave his life; a devotion that caused him to abhor everything not consistent with a completely surrendered life. His life was a vivid example of complete unselfishness.

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<sup>1</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>William Kelly, as quoted by Turner, John Nelson Darby, p. 77.

This disregard for self has been described as,

. . . I was at first offended by his personal affectation of a careless exterior. But I soon understood, that in no other way could he gain equal access to the lower and lowest orders, and that he was moved not by asceticism, nor by ostentation, but by a self-abandonment fruitful of consequences.<sup>1</sup> He . . . marked his new relation to the world by living in a mud hovel in the county of Wicklow.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that such self-abandonment should result in a life of humble service. Trained as a scholar among the intellectuals, he found peace in laboring among the poor and ignorant. His unchallenged consistency, sincerity and unwearied service to the faith to which his soul was yielded in his early years commands the reverence and admiration of those who recognized in him a spiritual guide.<sup>3</sup>

Incidents illustrating his singularly kind and benevolent nature are numerous. While addressing a meeting he would roll up his coat as a pillow for a sleeping child whose uncomfortable attitude had struck him. On one of his numerous voyages he paced the deck all night with a restless child in his arms so that the tired mother could get some rest. Though possessing little financial wealth he was known to assist immigrants in their passage, provide clothing for underprivileged children, or assume responsibility for payment of medicine for certain destitute families. On occasions he labored at the menial task of some of his friends who were ill to prevent them from losing their employment while indisposed. While visiting in various cities in Britain, the Continent, and America, he preferred to stay with the poor instead of the

<sup>1</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Croskery, "John Nelson Darby," p. 441.

<sup>3</sup>Turner, John Nelson Darby, A Biography, p. 62.



rich. One incident is recorded of his arrival in a certain Swiss city where the elite of the assembly were adroitly maneuvering for the privilege of entertaining the 'great man.' Appraising the situation at a glance, he inquired as to who usually entertained the visiting brothers. When all eyes turned to a meek, but poor, man standing in the rear, he replied, "I will stay where the other brethren stay."<sup>1</sup>

His kindly thoughtfulness for his poorer brethren, both in temporal and spiritual needs, was most marked.

His patience with honest ignorance, his ready tact, his manliness of character, and hearty sympathy endeared him to many, especially among the poorer classes.<sup>2</sup>

Nor was this place of supremacy confined to his relation with the poor, for he was held in high regard by men of scholarly attainment. On a visit to Oxford University he "instantaneously assumed the place of universal father-confessor, as if he had been a known and long trusted friend. His insight into character, and tenderness pervading his austerity, so opened young men's hearts that day after day there was no end of secret closeting with him."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the strong revulsion which I felt against some of the peculiarities of this remarkable man, I for the first time in my life found myself under the dominion of a superior. When I remember, how even those bowed down before him, who had been to him in the place of parents -- accomplished and experienced minds, -- I cease to wonder in the retrospect, that he reveted me in such bondage. . . . In his reply I always expected to find a higher portion of God's Spirit, than in any I could frame for myself. In order to learn divine truth, it became a surer process to consult him than to search for myself. . . .<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Turner, John Nelson Darby, p. 35, et. passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

The motivating factor of his love for Christ is most clearly demonstrated in his activity as a religious leader. If any man ever dominated a religious movement by personal magnetism it was Darby. His control over his followers has been termed, "nothing short of popery."<sup>1</sup>

As the leader of a religious party, he wields more power than all the bishops of England put together. He has attained, indeed, an influence and authority among the Brethren not to be found in any other Protestant community on earth.<sup>2</sup>

While it cannot be denied that much of his immense influence over his followers was the result of his own ambition, a careful analysis of his life and work will reveal that again and again he took a definite stand on certain issues "for the cause of Christ." He professed to require a New Testament precedent for every act or doctrine, and never ceased to apply the Scriptures to himself.

. . . I admired his unflinching consistency. For now, as always, all he said was based on texts aptly quoted and logically enforced. He made me more and more ashamed of Political Economy and Moral Philosophy and all Sciences; all of which ought to be "counted dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord." For the first time in my life I saw a man earnestly turning into reality the principles which others professed with their lips only.<sup>3</sup>

His leadership was neither the product of a morbid spirituality, nor of mere religious emotionalism, but the result of a clear apprehension of the object for which he had been apprehended by Christ.<sup>4</sup> He was ever mindful of the spiritual needs of his followers, and his thoughts, both in speech and writing, constantly soared to the spiritual solutions for all

<sup>1</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>Stokes, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Turner, John Nelson Darby, A Biography, pp. 23-24.



things. He abjured systems and was lost in a mystic contemplation--dreaming of reproducing on earth a spontaneous harmony of a pure spiritual state.

Though he was active in religious controversy, his mind was constantly upon Christ and the truth of His Church. In the preface to one of his controversial tracts he writes,

It is far more happy to be occupied in considering the riches of the grace of God, and of the love of Christ than to be discussing questions of office and institutions. It is however at times necessary to speak about these also, when they are put forward with a view of troubling the peace of Christians and of exciting their minds. . . . It is, then, in order to clear up these contested points, and to tranquillize the minds of Christians that I would say a few words upon office and gifts. I do so, however, with the most fervent desire that each one, after having been enlightened on the subject, may turn from these questions and leave them entirely alone, so as to be occupied with Christ, and His exhaustless love and immeasurable grace. For it is that which nourishes and edifies, while questions tend to dryness and barren-ness of soul.<sup>1</sup>

Darby's spirit in controversy reveals again the many facets of his character. When he thought the cause of Christ was being jeopardized he became ruthless, letting nothing stand in his way to advance a refutation to what he believed to be contrary to truth. Close friends of many years acquaintance were called, "seducers of the faith," while appellatives such as "enemies of Christ," "perverters of the saints," "our adversaries" were used to denounce those with whom he disputed.

Some of his most bitter denunciations, it must be admitted, are based on apparent jealousy for his own position of authority.

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Gifts and Offices in the Church, Col. Writ., Ecclesiastical Vol. III, p. 1.

For the first time I perceived that so vehement a champion of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, so staunch an opposer of creed and churches, was wedded to an extra-scriptural creed of his own, by which he tested the spiritual state of his brethren.<sup>1</sup>

It is this aspect of Darby's multiple personality that does him no credit. It is precisely this dominant trait that almost destroyed the pure ground of fellowship upon which Brethrenism was based. He cannot be commended for relentlessly prolonging his controversy with B.W. Newton, for imposing such harsh demands in the Bethesda issue, nor for forcing such a narrow limit of fellowship upon all of Brethrenism.<sup>2</sup> These derogatory aspects of his character must be frankly admitted. They cannot, however, wholly detract from a great heart filled with love for Christ and passionately determined to do all necessary to protect the interest of His cause.

He cannot be admired for the use he made of his friends to further his personal ambitions, but nothing but the highest admirations can be given to a man who will sacrifice friends, as he had already sacrificed his own personal comforts, for the love of Christ and His kingdom. His zeal for the cause of Christ is illustrated by his frank admission in referring to one of his controversies.

I am ready (as I have ever said and felt so) to confess my share as the first among those whose unfaithfulness and want of spirituality gave occasion to the inroad . . . . But I cannot (even though my failing may have helped to give occasion to the ruin coming in) acquiesce in it, when it is come in and is manifest. Nor do I think it mercy to leave the poor and simple saints exposed to it . . . . I cannot do so before God.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Of. post. Chapter II this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Account of Proceedings at Rawstrone Street, in November and December, 1846, With an Answer to the "Reasons" Circulated in Justification of the Refusal of Mr. Newton to Meet the Brethren, Col. Writ., Ecc., Vol. IV, p. 154.



While he was vicious in controversy, he exhibited a natural hesitancy to enter such conflicts. As a preface to many of his controversial tracts he acknowledges this hesitancy.<sup>1</sup> In one he states,

My intention is not controversy . . . . It may be perhaps said to me:--If desirous of avoiding controversy, why do you enter upon such subjects? I reply that, along with a sincere desire for peace, it is not right on that account to refrain from setting forth important principles. . . . Although the brother who has replied to me blames me, I continue to respect and love him. . . . I hope not to be found wanting in love whilst making a few remarks on my brother's work . . .<sup>2</sup>

Because of the youth of the author, he delayed for eleven months in answering a pamphlet entitled, Ministry As Opposed to Hierachism and Chiefly Religious Radicalism, in which the author attacked "Plymouthism," "not wanting to condemn what was youthful enthusiasm in an unfair and undue manner." However, when the pamphlet was approved by the Lay Society<sup>3</sup> and by the Report of the Evangelical Society of Geneva, he retorted in severe criticism with such expressions as "a temerity which erases with the dash of a pen all that has been written on the subject from the time of Chrysostron . . . self contradiction of the grossest kind . . . a contempt for the Word . . . deliberate misrepresentation of the Scripture."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As in Ecclesiastical Vol. I, pp. 169, 240, 314, 405, 415, 420; Ecc. Vol. III, pp. 266, 305, 369; Doctrinal Vol. VII, p. 228, etc.

<sup>2</sup> J.N. Darby, Some Further Developments of the Principles Set Forth in the Pamphlet, entitled, "On the Formation of Churches," and Reply to Some Objections Made to these Principles, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol I, pp. 238-40.

<sup>3</sup> Sitting of Committee, June 9, 1843, Bulletin No. 5, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> J.N. Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Holy Ghost in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 318.

Other evidences of his hesitancy to enter controversy are reflected in his attitude toward his purpose in writing.

The writer has only to repeat his entire regret at the occasion of it /writing the tract/. He has refrained from any statement of, or invective against, the flagrant and painful abuses, which must and ought to shock the conscience, connected with the subject; or attributing motives to those implicated in what the tract charges as evil . . .<sup>1</sup>

In the preface of one of his most controversial tracts, he states, "They were written for edification, not controversy."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of his hesitancy for controversy, he viewed it as an integral part of his task. He felt it his duty to refute everything which might subvert the growth of the weak in the faith. He had no interest in a purely intellectual debate, but desired to expose the basic fallacies of his opponents that their errors might be plain to all.

If I have to take my adversaries up, because they still carry on their warfare, and Satan is using them for mischief, I here declare I will not spare them, nor fail, with God's help, to make plain the tenets and doctrines which are at the bottom of all this.<sup>3</sup>

It is strange that a man of such deep spirituality should at times exhibit a haughty, imperious, peremptory, intractable nature. Every biographer of Darby is constantly faced with these two contradictory traits of his personality, and few have treated it in its proper perspective. Those who are not in accord with his general views usually stress his controversial nature and picture him as an arrogant, vain, pompous imperium.<sup>7</sup> His followers tend to regard all his adverse qualities as arising from his

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to the Two Leading Articles of the Christian Journal entitled, "Our Separating Brethren," Ecc. Vol. III, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Suffering of Christ, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. II, p. 215.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 214.



zeal and consequently excusable. He was neither saint nor sinner, though he often displayed characteristics of both. His deep spirituality, love for Christ, and kindly regard for others cannot be erased by his tyrannical qualities, nor, on the other hand, can this antagonistic nature be ignored.

The most logical explanation is that he was a man filled with a passion; a passion that erupted in a tumultuous crusade for what he believed to be right. He expressed the secret of his whole life and work as, "Our duty as believers is to be witnesses of what we believe."<sup>1</sup> He carried this out in a life of indefatigable activity. If this purpose interrupted his fraternal relations he did not hesitate to sacrifice them on the altar of duty, counting it a solemn responsibility to consider the cause of Christ as paramount. He did not doubt that the sole reason of his existence was to serve; executing this conviction drove him to bitter extremes in his relationship with others. Consequently, most of his life, and a large portion of his writings, were of a controversial nature.

His purpose in these controversial writings was not to achieve triumph in disputes, but to help the saints and to serve the Lord. He did not relish controversy -- "my heart and head alike are weary of controversy"<sup>2</sup>-- nor did he turn from it when he felt that through it he could advance the cause of Christ." . . . disliking contention, and weary of it, (I) much preferred direct edification . . . (and had a) unwillingness, unless by

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Answer to a "Letter to the Brethren and Sisters who Meet for Communion in Ebrington Street", Col. Writ., Prophetic, Vol. III, p. 491.

what was identified with direct edification, to raise questions in public."<sup>1</sup>

His entire action against his brethren, however, cannot be so summarily explained and dismissed, for his personal ambitions must be admitted. Perhaps his zeal for Christ usurped control over his personality until his antagonistic spirit became a part of that personality. F.W. Newman seems to suggest this.

. . . this gentleman has every where displayed a wonderful power of bending other minds to his own, and even stamping upon them the tones of his voice and all sorts of slavish imitation. Over the general results of his action I have long deeply mourned, as blunting his natural tenderness and sacrificing his wisdom to the letter, dwarfing men's understandings, contracting their hearts, crushing their moral sensibilities, and setting those at variance who ought to love; yet oh! how specious it was in the beginning! he only wanted men "to submit their understanding to God," that is, to the Bible, that is, to his interpretation. (Italic not in original.)<sup>2</sup>

One thing is certain, however: few men have ever loved Christ with such a passion nor given themselves so completely to the work of the kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

His philosophy of life is best expressed in his own words.

Brethren, when we have His acceptance manifest and declared, we may leave all the rest alone. This is what being faithful to Christ means. Let us have patience. He will judge everything ere long. Til then, let us walk in faith; His word is enough for us. At the time appointed He will justify us before the world, and will put full honour upon his own word and faith.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Claims of the Church of England Considered; Being the Close of Correspondence Between the Rev. James Kelly of Stillogram, Ireland, and J.N. Darby, Col. Writ., Ecc. III, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 29, " . . . never before have I seen a man so resolved that no word of the New Testament should be a dead letter to him."

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, On Gifts and Offices in the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 9.



As an author and a scholar, Darby again exhibits conflicting characteristics. In his thought-processes he soared to the heights, while in literary distinction he never quite measured up to his ability.

He began writing at the age of twenty-eight, and from then until his death at the advanced age of eighty-two, there followed in quick succession works of marked spirituality covering the widest fields of inquiry. His published works number over forty volumes of six hundred pages each, covering ecclesiastical, doctrinal, prophetical, critical, X evangelistic, apologetic, practical, expositional, and devotional subjects, as well as several volumes of poetry and hymns. Resplendent with his knowledge and use of the Scriptures, they are filled with repeated use of phrases such as, "according to the Word of God," "as found in the Word," and "from the Holy Writ." With simple faith in the scriptures as the inspired Word from whence came all guidance and instruction, he had a single approach: abstaining from the abstract philosophical argument, he simply opened the Bible and absorbed its message with little regard for extraneous study.

. . . while pressing the authority of every letter of the Scripture with an unshrinking vehemence that I never saw surpassed, yet, with a common inconsistency, (he) showed more indifference towards learned historical and critical evidence on the side of Christianity; and indeed, unmercifully exposed erudition to scorn, both by caustic reasoning, and by irrefragable quotation of texts.<sup>1</sup>

One of his chief contributions to the field of the theological literature of Brethrenism is his Translation of the Holy Scripture, "an entirely free and independent rendering of the whole original text, using all known helps."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Newman, op. cit., p. 42. This is not to be construed as to mean that Darby did not have the critical apparatus at his command, for he was well schooled in all techniques of scholarship.

<sup>2</sup>Turner, John Nelson Darby, p. 53.

The Revisers used his New Testament, and were astonished at the amount of painstaking research exceeding that of most, if not all, as two of the best in the company wrote to the late William Kelly . . . . In the translation of the Scriptures the literary was made to give place to the literal, and hence it is characterized by a certain abruptness of style. This, however, is more than compensated for (sic) by the invaluable notes with which it is furnished, and which in the judgement of competent critics betokens true scientific scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

His answer to F.W. Newman's Phases of Faith, entitled, The Irrationalism of Infidelity,<sup>2</sup> remains one of the finest ever written on the subject, covering critical questions as well as expositional ones. His Synopsis of the Bible, five volumes, have been highly acclaimed as a scholarly work. The Bishop of Gloucester, Dr. C.J. Ellicott, himself the editor of a well-known commentary, recommended it to the theological

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<sup>1</sup>Turner, loc. cit. Turner, undoubtedly a Plymouth Brother himself, and an ardent follower of Darbyism, is understandably profuse in his praise of Darby's translation. Not all writers would agree, however, as is attested by two reviews to which the reader is directed. Darbyism and Its New Bible, Taken from an Article Communicated to "The Sword and Trowel," Monthly Magazine of Rev. O.H. Spurgeon (London: W. Mackintosh, 1874), p. 18, comments, "We don't even mention the other renderings in his new Bible, just as serious and erroneous as the above; much less notice the transposition of tenses and prepositions, or the awkward English diction throughout. Suffice it to say, that some renderings are good, and some of the notes are good; but, taken as a whole, with a great display of learning, the ignorance of the results of modern criticism is almost incredible. And the fatal upsetting of vital doctrines condemns the work altogether as more calculated to promote scepticism than true religion -- the most sacred subjects being handled with irreverent familiarity." Mr. Darby's New Bible and Its Announcement by One Who Writes on Behalf of Many (London: W. Mackintosh, 1868), p. 14, evaluates it as, "Endless blunders, errors, mistranslations, confounding of moods, tenses and preposition -- do not surprise us."

Such criticism is extremely harsh, and not altogether warranted by the facts, for it is certain that the author is as passionately prejudiced against Darby as Turner is for him. It is clearly evident that there is a measure of truth in both analyses. Regardless of the questioned accuracy, however, since Darby's translation was used almost exclusively by his followers, its contribution to that movement establishes its importance in the literature of Brethrenism.

<sup>2</sup>Contained in Col. Writ. Apologetic Vol. I.



students of his diocese. The late Dr. Harry A. Ironside, noted American Bible expositor, remarked that if he had to give up all the books of his library except one, he would keep the Synopsis.<sup>1</sup>

While he wrote indefatigably, he was indifferent to literary distinction. He was primarily concerned with the glory of Christ, not self-aggrandizement. He valued simplicity of thought and understanding above style; consequently, many of his sentences are complex and involved, with paragraph contained within paragraph, in an attempt to explain and guard against misunderstanding. Unfortunately, his attempts at clarity only confuse the reader since his style becomes so abstruse that the reader loses the original thought in the complexity of qualifying phrases.

An example of his involved style illustrates the plight of the reader.

They have seen, on a subsequent evening (where, as I undoubtedly judge Satan made a seemingly overpowering effort to upset all they were doing, and hinder, by distracting and speaking them down, their acting on what they had been led to), that the same brethren, after listening to all those who came thus to interpret them from other places (proving they rejected none), could adhere, as led and guided of God, with firmness to that which they had been led to by Him; and could prove, when thus put to the severest test, with little or nothing really to help them from without, that God's blessed presence in their weakness could give patience and grace, and deference to the weakest within, and resist the noisiest and most clamorous from without; nor was there the slightest idea of rejecting the help and assistance, and spiritual wisdom of those whose experience and faithfulness they trusted in, but the glad acceptance of it; as such as have more or less that character acted just in setting the matters before their conscience.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>During a lecture to theological students at which the author was present.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Account of Proceedings at Rawstrone Street, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, pp. 225-26.

This abstruseness of style is not due to lack of scholarship on Darby's part. A Classical Gold Medalist at Trinity College, Dublin, he was well versed in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French and German. His writings reveal an extensive knowledge of philosophy, history (particularly ecclesiastical) and the sciences. He has been called the Tertullian of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> and the Goliath of Dissent.<sup>2</sup> His style was certainly not due to lack of discipline as a student since he devoted his whole life to studious activities. ". . . he was habitually a hard worker, from early morn devoted to his own reading the Word and prayer . . . . Indeed, whole days were frequently devoted to Scripture reading wherever he moved, at home or abroad."<sup>3</sup>

Two factors may be said to have contributed to his style: his overwhelming passion to state and defend the truth of the gospel, and a hurried disregard for form. Many of his tracts are evidently nothing more than sermon notes, possibly jotted down in a hurry.<sup>4</sup> Others seem to be hardly more than mere first-drafts; some even to be uncorrected notes of lectures or sermons taken down by others.

<sup>1</sup>Pickering, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>D'Arcy Sirr, Memiors of Archbishop Le Poer Trench, p. 344, as quoted by Neatby, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>William Kelly, as quoted by Turner, John Nelson Darby, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>In the preface to Evangelical Protestantism and the Biblical Studies of M. Godet, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. VII, p. 228, for example, he admits, "the following pages were hastily penned . . . whilst travelling and in the midst of innumerable fatigues accompanying the ministry of word." See also Reply to the Remarks in the Two Leading Articles of the Christian Journal, entitled "Our Separating Brethren," Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 176.



Mr. Darby was deliberate and prayerful in weighing a scripture; but he wrote rapidly; as thoughts arose in his spirit, and often with scarcely a word changed. He delighted in concatenated sentences, sometimes with a parenthesis within a parenthesis, to express the truth fully, and with guards against misconception. An early riser and indefatigable worker, he yet had not the time to express himself as briefly and clearly as he could wish. 'You write to be read and understood,' he once said playfully to me; 'I only think on paper.' This made his writings, to the uninitiated, anything but pleasant reading, and to a hasty glance almost unintelligible; so that many, even among the highly educated believers, turned away, because of their inability to penetrate sentences so involved.<sup>1</sup>

He was doubtless conscious of this difficulty, since he felt it necessary in the preface of one of his tracts to state,

It /what he had written/ seems to me that as it stands it is quite sufficiently clear to any upright mind. I am not so foolish as to think that all the expressions in it are the best, or absolutely exact or just, as if I was (sic) inspired . . . . To the humblest and weakest of God's saints, I should gladly explain my meaning. . . .<sup>2</sup>

While his style was bad the force of his written work cannot be denied. One opponent, after an exchange of tracts with him, remarked, "J.N.D. writes with a pen in one hand and a thunderbolt in the other."<sup>3</sup>

. . . his style is execrable; his grammar bad; yet the criticism is just that 'Those obscure, uncouth, ungrammatical, torturous sentences, which only excite our contempt, enter into the very bone of the victims, and paralyzes them in the inner man.' So far as we may judge by his writings, he seems to be a man of iron will, without bowels or sympathies . . . . He certainly brings into theological literature and controversy a plainness of speech that has almost gone out of fashion in the churches . . . .<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>William Kelly, as quoted by Turner, op. cit., pp. 72 - 73.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Sufferings of Christ, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. II, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup>Turner, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Stokes, op. cit., p. 12.

Most of Darby's writings are polemic in nature. Many of them are tracts written in answer to a tract by some one else, in which he either answers a charge, or uses a statement to manipulate an answer in a positive fashion. In most of these the reader is subjected to an endless series of references to the tract in question, the context of which he knows nothing; a factor which he finds most disconcerting.

The Collected Writings are largely repetitious since they are a collection of assorted pamphlets, tracts and letters written on various occasions and often on the same subject. Consequently, the reader has a voluminous quantity of tedious material presented on identical subjects, frequently with the same argument, phrases and words repeated. If the repetitious materials were deleted, particularly in the ecclesiastical volumes, the forty volumes could be reduced to a much smaller number of readable books.

Neatby adequately evaluates Darby as an author.

He carried his neglect of appearances into his written and spoken composition; and that to such an extent that the style of his writing to the reader of today seems half ludicrous, half disgusting . . . . /but/ all misgiving as to the teacher's sincerity -- even as to his absorbing earnestness of aim -- disappears before it. Darby's own account of the matter was that he could have equalled the rhetorical flights of the great masters, but he never thought it worthwhile . . . . it is hard to read Darby's better works without fancying that a noble eloquence was really at his command, if only he had chosen to cultivate it. Bad as his style is, it is the badness of an almost incredible carelessness rather than a defective power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 49-50.



## CHAPTER II

### THE RISE OF BRETHRENISM

The last half of the eighteenth century witnessed a change little short of a revolution in the internal condition of the Established church in England. This change did not erupt in a schismatic disruption of the ecclesiastical system, but was silent and unobserved at the time; a change of spirit rather than outward appearances, so gradual that for a time it was unheeded. Only through the surge of individual movements did its presence become recognized. The first half of the nineteenth century gave rise to various dissenting groups and these focused the attention of the Church on its own failures.

A contributory cause to this change lay in the nature of the Established Church -- its position as the State church. After the expulsion of the Non-conformists in 1667, the identification of the Church and State became more apparent. The sovereign of the State came to be regarded as the temporal head of the Church; its rulers sat in the legislature and its clergy had an official position assigned by law.<sup>1</sup>

This alliance of Church and State produced a situation where, apart from a Dissenting minority, all citizens were automatically members of the parish churches, and the spiritual life of the clergy was identified closely with the political life of the state. Of this church it has been recorded,

. . . of zeal for the gospel, of yearning compassion for the souls of men, of earnest striving after a holier and better life, the traces are few indeed. Its divines might deprecate infidelity and enter into the lists with the deists and free-thinkers of the time but their

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<sup>1</sup>J. Guinness Rogers, Church Systems of the XIX Century (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881), p. 103.

devotion to Christianity was all expended in their polemics and never expressed itself in forceful appeals to the heart and conscience.

The appellation of High Churchman was mainly a political one. It was one of supremacy against all dissenters; the contention was not for doctrine, but for political authority. Its force in Parliament was all but omnipotent. The Church upheld the right of the Crown to a power little short of despotism, and received in return absolute supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

Negligent of duty and unfaithful to the gospel to which they were committed, the clergy lacked in fervour and faith, apparently interested primarily in selfish ends.

. . . testimonies . . . as to the weakness of the pulpit, the poverty and unimpressiveness of the sermons which were preached; to the contemptuous indifference with which a large portion of the clergy ignored the distinctive truths of Christianity, and mocked hungry souls with the dry husks of a heartless morality; to their neglect of the more spiritual function of their sacred office and to the consequent prevalence among the people of an immorality and ungodliness passing on to absolute heathenism . . . . Bishop Ryle says, 'The sermons were unspeakably and indubitably bad, and it is comforting to reflect that they were generally preached to empty benches.'<sup>2</sup>

This was a result of the direction in which the Church was travelling, that is, a tendency to treat the spiritual elements of religion as incompatible with the direction of science, and, by ignoring the supernatural element, to reduce religion to a cold and formal morality.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-21.

<sup>3</sup>"Had the report of these conditions come only from one class of writers, it might have been hoped that it was highly colored by party bias or religious zeal. But the witnesses are of all varieties of opinion, and many of them without bias of any kind. Among them are prelates like Butler, and retailers of scandal like Lord Hervey and Horace Walpole, novelists such as Fielding and Smollett, whose pages reflect the state of morals at the time, and historians differing in political sympathies, who honestly report what they found in contemporary sources. Whatever kind of book we open we find the testimony is the same. . . . as to facts, divines and historians, gossiping scandalmongers and politicians, philosophers and biographers all agree . . . . there is a general agreement that England was largely suffering from a moral pestilence under whose destructive influences faith, purity and integrity were withering away." Rogers, Ibid., p. 123.



The Evangelical Revival of John Wesley and Whitefield did much to allay the corruption of the Church and revive the spiritual genuineness of the clergy. The history of the century is a history of dissension -- of the Oxford Movement, the Tractarian controversies, and the rise of independent dissenters such as the Kellyites and Walkerites. Dissension brought a new impetus into the Established church, for each dissension produced a subsequent controversy, and this, in turn, caused a fresh re-awakening within the church.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, it was still in a state of nearly unparalleled apathy and supineness. The clergy, with some honorable exceptions, were worldly and careless in dispensing their duties, preaching at best but a carnal and soul-benumbing morality, and trafficking in the souls of men by receiving money for discharging the pastoral duties in parishes where they did not so much as look on the faces of the people more than once a year.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of many dissenting groups, and their doctrines, are proof of the wide diffusion of unrest that existed at that time among spiritual leaders. However, it is here to be noted, later to be proved, that the rise of Brethrenism did not come as a rebellion against the Established Church,<sup>2</sup> and was not a part of the dissenting groups. It did not originate as a protest against error, but as a vigorous assertion of a fundamental truth as seen by its leaders.

<sup>1</sup>W.G. Turner, John Nelson Darby: A Biography (London: C.A. Hammond, 1926), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Except that the corruption within the Established Church moved individual Brethren leaders to an introspective examination of their own place in the Church.

Whatever may be said of the origin of the Brethren movement, it cannot be stated that it started at a specific place or time. Attempts to trace its historical genesis can only begin with a series of independent groups meeting at various locations without knowledge of other similar meetings. It cannot be stated to have developed, on the one hand by a slow and laborious process, or, on the other hand by the sudden genius of one man.

It can be avowed, however, that the movement gained impetus through the amalgamation of several of these small meetings, and that after this common meeting, its growth rested in several early leaders: A.N. Groves, B.W. Newton, W.H. Dorman, E.Cronin, J.G. Bellett, S.P. Tregelles, and J.N. Darby, each of whom contributed an integral part to its growth.

The maker of Brethrenism as a system, however, was undeniably J.N. Darby, who became its energizing and guiding spirit throughout. "In the grandeur of his conception, in the irresistible vehemence of his will, in his consummate strategical instinct, in his genius for administration . . . . in his immense personal ascendancy, he stands unrivalled amongst the Brethren."<sup>1</sup>

Of the main unaffiliated groups in Ireland and England between 1825 and 1832, only Dublin, Plymouth and Bristol contributed directly to the origin of the movement. From the standpoint of date and influence, it is clear that the Dublin meeting preceded the other two. If the

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<sup>1</sup>W. Blair Neatby, A History of the Plymouth Brethren (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), p. 44.



origin of the movement must be localized, Dublin must be regarded as the place from which its spirit emanated<sup>1</sup>-- a spirit without which the independent and often divergent meetings could never have evolved into a movement.

The history of the Dublin meeting can be seen in its proper perspective only through the personalities involved. Most prominent of these early leaders was A.N. Groves. Born in 1795, he was trained as a dentist, and entered practice in Plymouth, from whence he later moved to Exeter where he became exceedingly prosperous. From the age of twenty he had felt the call to the mission field, but due to the opposition of his wife, this had been held in abeyance. In 1825, with full concurrence of his wife, he decided to abandon his profession and qualify as an ordained missionary.<sup>2</sup>

He entered Trinity College, Dublin, the same year, but did not reside in Dublin since he needed only to appear for examinations at the end of term. On such visits he met with a group of Christians who gathered for mutual aid in study and prayer.

This group, according to Groves, were "chiefly members of the Establishment who . . . desired to see more devotedness to Christ and

<sup>1</sup>Hy Pickering, Chief Men Among the Brethren (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1931, 2nd. edition), p. 23, refers to an earlier meeting conducted in Demerara by a Leonard Strong, a former Church of England curate. "Years before Anthony Norris Groves and his friends, Leonard Strong read the same Bible and found the same principles. So he gave up his living . . . and met simply for worship among his converts, many hundreds of whom followed him. The first meeting was held in a large shed . . . about 2000 being present." It cannot be doubted that this, and perhaps other similar independent meetings occurred, but from the standpoint of historical continuity there is no connection between this group and the movement, and the origin of Brethrenism as a system must be focused on Dublin.

<sup>2</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 52.

union among all the people of God,"<sup>1</sup> and who met together somewhat regularly for this purpose.<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1827,<sup>3</sup> J.G. Bellett, a member of the group, related to another, Miss Bessy Paget,

Groves has just been telling me, that it appears to him from Scripture that believers, meeting together as disciples of Christ, were free to break bread together as their Lord had admonished them, and that, in so far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord's Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death, and obeying his parting command.<sup>4</sup>

This suggestion was immediately carried out by himself and his friends in Dublin.

This memorable suggestion seems to have laid the foundation of Brethrenism. The chief members of the group were Groves, Bellett, Francis Hutchinson, and Edward Cronin.<sup>5</sup> There was no disposition to make a break with the Established church; indeed, some of the members were clergymen,

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. A.N. Groves, Memoirs of A.N. Groves (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>G.T. Stokes, "J.N. Darby," Contemporary Review (London: Isbister & Co.), October, 1885, Vol. 48, p. 539, regards this merely as a "Drawing room meeting for prayer and study of Scripture, which even took the place of lighter amusement in a somewhat extensive circle in the Irish metropolis, and which were then quite the rage with all serious minds." Whether this was true or not, subsequent events were to translate it from the realm of a meeting of nondescript terms to a vigorous campaign for truth as its leaders saw it.

<sup>3</sup>Stokes, loc. cit., assigns this date to 1826, but Neatby, op. cit., p. 7, contends that this is incorrect inasmuch as Groves expressly states that it was on the return from this visit that he was asked by Miss Paget to address her group at Poltimore (Memoirs, p. 40). In a letter to Mr. T. Caldecott, under the date of August 8, 1827, he speaks of this having happened "since I last wrote." Ibid., p. 45. A letter to the same correspondent is published bearing the date of April 2, 1827. Ibid., p. 19. However, Groves did not visit Dublin in the summer of 1827 since he had given up studies. It appears then, that this must have happened prior to the April date.

<sup>4</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Groves, op. cit., p. 40.



and all continued to worship at times in their own churches without any idea of a mission to protest against ecclesiastical evil.

Groves' churchmanship was still strongly that of the Established church; so much so that a request to address a dissenting group brought him a "repugnance . . . because I really disapproved on principle . . . and saw that it would stand in the way of my procuring ordination . . . . I had never yet been near a dissenting place of worship."<sup>1</sup> After he had given up the idea of completing his education, considering it nonessential, he applied to the Church Missionary Society to work as a layman. However, when informed that he would not be allowed to dispense the sacraments because he was not ordained, he gave up the idea.

The experience, however, led him to a realization of what was to become one of the 'cardinal truths' of Brethrenism; the principle of the liberty of all believers to minister in Christ.

My mind was in great straits; for I saw not yet my liberty of ministry to be from Christ alone, and felt some ordination to be necessary but hated the thought of being made a sectarian. But, one day the thought was brought to my mind, that ordination of any kind to preach the gospel is no requirement of Scripture. To me it was the removal of a mountain . . . . From that moment, I have myself never had a doubt of my own liberty in Christ to minister the Word; and in my last visit to Dublin I mentioned my views to dear Mr. Bellett and others.<sup>2</sup>

Bellett records the incident as,

walking down the street one day with him . . . he said to me, 'This I doubt not is the mind of God concerning us -- we should come together in all simplicity as disciples, not waiting on any pulpit or ministry, but trusting that the Lord would edify

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

us together by ministering as He pleased and saw good from the midst of us.<sup>1</sup>

Two principles upon which Brethrenism was founded were thus contributed by Groves: that every Lord's Day should be set aside for 'breaking of bread' in remembrance of the Lord's death and obedience to his parting command; and, that liberty of ministry is from the call of Christ, not by ordination of man. In 1829 he left for India as a faith missionary and by such circumstances virtually separated himself from the movement in England.

The exact date upon which Darby came into contact with the Dublin group cannot be stated with certainty, nor can the extent to which the ideas of Groves had developed at the time of his contact. His first contacts were, no doubt, sporadic ones which occurred on his frequent visits to Dublin from his curacy in Wicklow.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that he was introduced to the meeting by Bellett,<sup>3</sup> whose first reference to him occurs in a letter dated January 31, 1827.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Henry Groves, Memoirs of Lord Congleton (London: John F. Shaw & Co., 1884), p.15.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Miller, The Brethren, Their Origin, Progress and Testimony (London: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Pickering, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>An accident which necessitated treatment and a long period of convalescence in Dublin brought his conflicting doubts into focus. "During my solitude, conflicting thoughts increased; but much exercise of soul had the effect of causing the Scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me. I had always owned them to be the Word of God . . . the careful reading of Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early church; which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state. . . ." Darby, Letter to Prof. Tholuck, as quoted by Neatby, op. cit., pp. 35-36.



The first reference to Darby breaking bread with the group places the date in the winter of 1827-28. It is certain that Darby had not at this time resigned from his charge in the Establishment. Bellett refers to a meeting of 'breaking of bread' at a time when "John Darby was still in the county Wicklow as a clergyman and I was still going to Stanford Chapel."<sup>1</sup> The resignation may safely be assigned to the latter part of 1828 or early 1829. His churchmanship does not seem to have ended, however, with his resignation but to have continued until as late as 1834 when Bellett infers that he was "all but detached from the Church of England."<sup>2</sup>

An adequate analysis of the facts of these early days reveals that the first meetings were spontaneous gatherings of men with kindred minds, and were not protest meetings at all. The principles which later infused the entire Brethren movement were, however, gradually growing upon the consciousness of the men involved.

A non-conformist movement was growing parallel to it in Dublin at about the same time, and the two groups were subsequently to amalgamate. The leader of this group was Edward Cronin, a convert from Catholicism<sup>3</sup> who came to Dublin in 1826 as a medical student. As an Independent he was admitted to fellowship with several dissenting societies for a while, but was later refused admission to any of them until he definitely aligned himself with one of them. It is clear that Cronin's

<sup>1</sup>A.G. Bellett, Recollections of J.G. Bellett (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Stokes, op. cit., p. 561.

mind had been moving in channels similar to that of Groves, for he remarks, "This left me in separation from the table for several months . . . feeling unable to attend their meetings from the growing opposition to a one-man ministry."<sup>1</sup>

This move resulted in a protest by Edward Wilson, assistant secretary to the Bible Society, and to his subsequent withdrawal from the Society. With Wilson, two of his cousins, and a fifth member, Cronin started a group in his house on Lower Pembroke Street, where they, paralleling the group attended by Groves, Bellett, and Darby, emphasized the principle of oneness of the assembly before God, and the liberty of ministry in Christ.

Confusion as to how these groups amalgamated prohibits definite statement of facts. Darby indicates that Cronin's group had disbanded, and that "five of us - Bellett, Cronin, Hutchinson, Master Brooks . . . and myself met together at Hutchinson's house in Fitzwilliam Square."<sup>2</sup> He is either pointedly in error, or refers to an earlier meeting. It is improbable that he refers to an earlier meeting, however, since he specifically refers to the place of meeting as Fitzwilliam Square. The accounts of Cronin and Bellett definitely assign an entirely different character to this meeting.

Cronin indicates that his group did not dissolve, but expanded considerably, so that they were joined by Frances Hutchinson, "who, as we were becoming so numerous . . . offered us the use of his large room in Fitzwilliam Square."<sup>2</sup> Bellett more or less corroborates this first meeting.

<sup>1</sup>Edward Cronin, as quoted by Neathy, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Account of Proceedings . . ., Eccl. Vol. IV, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Cronin, as quoted by Neathy, op. cit., p. 20.



In the summer of 1829 our family was at Kingstown and dear Francis Hutchinson at Bray. We saw each other occasionally and spoke of the things of the Lord. . . . on returning to Dublin . . . Hutchinson was quite prepared for communion in the name of the Lord with all . . . who loved Him in sincerity, and proposed to have a room in his house in Fitzwilliam Sq. for that purpose . . . . Cronin was prepared for this fully . . . . Thus we continued from November, 1829.<sup>1</sup>

While the immediate circumstances concerning the union of the two groups are still open to divergent views, it may be concluded that Hutchinson was a member of Cronin's group, and that through his friendship with Bellett, the other group was brought to the meeting at his house. Darby's divergent account of the meeting still remains unexplained.

Opinions expressed at this meeting again disclose that among certain of the leaders there still remained an attachment to the Established Church, and their association with the group grew out of profound changes that were taking place in their thought concerning the relation of the Church to Christ, and any protest on their part as a dissenting group came as an aftermath of these changes. Cronin reveals this when he comments,

At this time J.G. Bellett and J.N. Darby were more or less affected by the general state of things in the religious world but were unprepared to come out into entire separation. They looked suspiciously at our movement, feeling still able to attend and minister in the Church of England, as well as to come occasionally to our little assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Bellett concurs by commenting, "I joined, but I do not think with the same liberty and decision of mind."<sup>3</sup> This hesitancy was due in part, no doubt, to the fact that until this time the meeting had not had

<sup>1</sup>Bellett, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Cronin, as quoted by Neatby, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Bellett, op. cit., p. 26.

a public character, and did not represent a publicly announced dissenting group. Hutchinson apparently had no thought of establishing such a group when he extended the invitation to meet in his house, for Bellett recalls that, "He did so, designing however so to have it, that if any were disposed to attend services in the parish church, or the dissenting chapels, they might not be hindered . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever were the intentions of the leaders, such a group evolved from the room in Fitzwilliam Square for it became both a permanent and regular place of meeting. Six months later, the group moved to a public location on Aungier Street, meeting in a hired hall.<sup>2</sup> The move was prompted by increased numbers and the proposal to let the breaking of bread become more of a witness.<sup>3</sup> This was the first public announcement of services, and as such, Brethrenism as a public movement was born.

. . . the consolidating force of the movement issued from the company that finally gathered at Aungier St. . . . Brethrenism was indeed formed out of a variety of little meetings of a more or less similar character, and these must be accepted as its ultimate elements; but Brethrenism, as we know it, is a synthesis, and the synthesis has a history; and I do not believe that its history can truly be told without locating its original force in Dublin, and at Aungier St.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Not without some dissension on the part of the leaders who had strong ties with the Established church. "Bellett was adverse to the change; Hutchinson was reluctant; Darby was absent; Cronin and Stokes (as non-conformists) were eager for it . . ." Neatby, op. cit., p. 22. This is but further evidence that the protest element was not primary in the beginning of the movement.

<sup>3</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 24.



When the meetings began in Hutchinson's house in 1829 he "prescribed a certain line of things, as the service of prayer, singing and teaching, that should be found amongst us each day."<sup>1</sup> However, when the move to Aungier Street was made, the settled order of worship observed at Fitzwilliam Square gradually changed. Teaching and exhortation were made common duties and services, while prayer was restricted under the care of two or three who were recognized as elders. Gradually, all of this yielded, and no appointed or recognized eldership was understood to be in the midst of the group, all services being of a free character; the presence of God through the Spirit being more simply believed and used. It gradually became the law of Brethrenism to disown all regularly constituted authority, all predetermined arrangement, and all prudential provision, even for emergencies which might arise.<sup>2</sup>

The only provision of admission into fellowship with them was that in addition to simple faith in Christ, a consistent walk in Christian love must be followed. All who felt themselves fitted to edify and whom the assembly regarded as an acceptable teacher, were at liberty to address the group. The brethren insisted on a spiritual ministry and the recurrence to the original principles of ministry, as interpreted by them, were urged. For the same reason, they did not appoint ministers, nor organize any church or special membership.<sup>3</sup> The principles of breaking

<sup>1</sup>Bellett, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Narrative of Facts Connected with the Separation of the Writer from the Congregation Meeting in Ebrington Street, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 136.

of bread every Lord's Day, the unity of all saints in Christ, and the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work among them, were paramount features of their worship. A common expression among the leaders of this period was "the Blood of the Lamb, and the Union of the Saints."<sup>1</sup>

The early meetings have been described as

. . . fellowship with those who . . . assembled upon principles taught in the Word of God, where no sectarian walls of division was acknowledged, and where there was liberty of the Spirit of God to minister to the truths (sic) of the Scripture by those who were gifted by Him for that purpose.

The distinction between poor and rich was lessened by holy, loving fellowship and unity . . . . Their dress was plain, their habits simple and their walk distinguished by separation from the world. The meetings of the assembly were calm, peaceful and hallowed; their singing soft, slow and thoughtful; their worship evinced the nearness of their communion with the Lord; their prayers were earnest for an increased knowledge of God, and the spread of his truth. Their teaching showed their deep searching of the Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, while the exercise of the varied ministry, under the power of the Holy Spirit, testified to the blessedness of the teaching of God's Word on each important subject. . . .

I breathed what appeared to me to be the pure element of love . . . . I was enlightened by its teachings, cheered by its joys, comforted by its hallowed fellowship, strengthened by godly companionship, and encouraged by those who were over me in the Lord. . . . The fruits of the Spirit were in evidence.<sup>2</sup>

It is doubtful if Darby was a real leader in this Dublin meeting, for there seems to be little reference to any marked contribution which he made. He attended the meetings, and approved their principles, but he does not seem to have been permanently located in Dublin. In relating

<sup>1</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Cole, unpublished letter as quoted by David J. Beattie, The Brethren, The Story of a Great Recovery (Kilmarnock: John Richie, Ltd., 1939), pp. 19-20; G.H. Lang, The Local Assembly (Walsham-le-Willows, author, 1942), Appendix A, p. 72. While the description given above refers primarily to the Plymouth meeting, it is characteristic of the movement in the early days.



the first meeting at Fitzwilliam Square, he adds, "I afterwards went down and worked at Limerick."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he was not in Dublin when the decision to move to Aungier St. was made.

If he seems to have played a minor role in its beginning, no question can be raised as to his personal pre-eminence when the period of consolidation and expansion was reached. Brethrenism was destined to exercise a world-wide influence; to establish itself as a force to be reckoned with in every corner of Christendom; to give rise to a most voluminous body of literature; and its destiny lay in the hands of the one man who gave it its direction.

From Limerick he went to Oxford "after July, 1830," where he was associated with George Wigram, where "breaking of bread had already begun."<sup>2</sup> Subsequently he met B.W. Newton who invited him to Plymouth. With Wigram, Newton, and a Captain Hall who had been preaching in the villages, "reading meetings were held, and the following year, 1831, began the practice of breaking of bread."<sup>3</sup> There was a group meeting with Newton before Darby arrived, but it remained for him to establish the principles which marked it as a continuation of the Dublin movement.

It was at Plymouth that the name "Brethren" was first used in connection with the group in England. Darby objected to denominational names, believing them to be at variance with the New Testament. He referred to the practice of Jesus and the apostles of addressing the believers as "brethren,"

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>S.P. Tregelles, Three Letters to the Author of 'A Retrospect of Events That Have Taken Place Amongst the Brethren' (London: Houlston & Sons, 1894, 2nd. edition), p. 7.

"holy brethren," and "beloved brethren," hence the name "brethren" became the designation of the group. The movement at Plymouth grew rapidly so that by 1840 there were 800 attending the meeting.<sup>1</sup> Reference to the movement came to be "the Brethren at Plymouth," and the name "Plymouth Brethren" became an almost inevitable designation for the movement in England. In Ireland it was known as "Darbyism," due, no doubt, to the large sphere of his work there after his labors in Plymouth.

Many groups were formed in other parts of Britain. Most notable of these was the one at Bristol where George Muller, brother-in-law of A.N. Groves, and Henry Craik, who had been a tutor in the Groves family, were the guiding forces. This group seems to have been begun entirely independent of the Dublin or Plymouth groups, but came to embody the same principles, and were consequently known as among the Brethren movement. Two groups met in Bristol: the Bethesda group where membership was restricted to those who had been immersed, and Gideon where membership was open to all. In the summer of 1837, however, both groups united under the principle of open membership.

Under Darby's energetic leadership and influences, Brethren groups were formed with increasing rapidity. The appeal of Brethrenism was one to spiritual unity and freedom, based on a literal interpretation of the Scriptures. The new movement demanded that deeds coincide with creeds, and a revival of personal spirituality grew as the result.

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<sup>1</sup>Turner, John Nelson Darby, p. 47. James Grant, The Plymouth Brethren: Their History and Heresies (London: W.H. Guest, 1876), p. 8, gives the number as 1200-1400 by 1835. He is pointedly in error here, however, for most conservative estimates of Brethrenism place that figure as late as 1845.



Men's minds were much unsettled on religious subjects, and many of the best men in the Church of England had left, and were leaving, because of the all but total absence of spiritual life, blended with no small amount of unsound teaching, in it. The result was that many spiritually minded people . . . were in a condition to embrace doctrines and principles of Church government which they considered to be more spiritual than those which were in ascendency in the Establishment.<sup>1</sup>

High among the conditions favoring the rise of Brethrenism was the distinguished social position and intellectual capabilities of its earliest leaders; men of considerable gifts, moral weight, and intelligence -- clergymen, barristers, solicitors, military and naval officers, physicians, and men of high title and property.<sup>2</sup> Above all these stood the genius of J.N. Darby. Whether by design or sheer force of his personality he exercised tremendous influence over all meetings.

<sup>1</sup>Grant, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>O.H. Mackintosh, as quoted by Beattie, op. cit., p. 16; Thomas Groskery, "John Nelson Darby" The Catholic Presbyterian Magazine, Vol. VII, 1882, p. 442. Among these leaders were George Wigram, one of the editors of the Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance, and a cognate concordance of the Greek New Testament; S.P. Tregelles, outstanding Biblical scholar and textual critic; George Muller, founder of one of Britain's most famous orphanages, Ashley Downs; Lord Congleton (John Parnell); Sir Alexander Campbell; Lady Powerscourt; the Earl of Craven; F.W. Newman; B.W. Newton, sometimes fellow at Oxford; Andrew Miller, prominent church historian, author of Short Papers on Church History; W.H. Kelly, author of a critical edition of The Revelation, which Professor Henrich Ewal of Gottingen declared was the finest piece of English work of that kind he had ever seen; J.E. Howard, eminent quinologist, a Fellow of the Royal Society, Fellow of the Linnean Society, and of other scientific societies on the Continent, as well as in Britain; J.C. Deck, noted hymn writer; and, J.S. Cliphant, Director of Funds for the India Office, Foreign Office. Authority for the position and social rank of the above-mentioned may be found in Napoleon Noel, The History of the Brethren (Denver: W.F. Knapp, 120 W. Maple Ave, 1936), et passim.

In his Swiss campaign, Darby admitted that it passed for an aristocratic movement. J.J. Herzog, Les Freres de Plymouth et John Darby, p. 82. One of his most severe critics admits, "This circumstance attributed to no small part of its influence." William Reid, Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted (Edinburgh: J.B. David, 1893), p. 162.

In 1838 Darby began his work in Switzerland where for seven years he enjoyed tremendous successes in his periodic visits. On his return to Britain in 1845 he went to Plymouth where B.W. Newton had continued to minister since the inception of the society. Within a short time strife between the two became inevitable, and blossomed into a bitter controversy that did much to stamp the future character of Brethrenism.

Cause for this controversy appears to be both theological and ecclesiastical, with strong evidence of personality clashes. The responsibility for the strife has been much disputed, depending upon the viewpoint of the various writers, but an appraisal of the results is universal: it caused a marked division among the group where there had been only apparent harmony and unity. The movement which began with the cry of "The Blood of the Lamb and the Union of the Saints" now became a seat of judgement for every theological error, however minor, that could be found in the opponents. The communion of the saints, with perfect liberty in Christ replacing ecclesiastical authority, ended in excommunication of the saints.

Darby's account<sup>1</sup> differs somewhat from most of the others. He makes two general charges against Newton: theological error, and, enforcing his

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts . . ., Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 2. This Narrative, when compared with other proved reliable sources, such as S.P. Tregelles and A.N. Groves, contains some glaring contradiction of facts. Darby pointedly makes the best case possible for his own position. In all fairness to him, however, it must be acknowledged that William Trotter, The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda (London: Gospel Book Store, Paternoster Sq., 1849), p. 31, records a meeting at Bath in May, 1848 in which "over 100 Brethren from all parts" subjected the Narrative "to strictest scrutiny; Lord Congleton endeavoring for five hours to prove them false. The result was . . . these pamphlets were fully established . . . They were vindicated from every attempt to call their statement in question . . ." However, no other record of the results of this meeting is to be found in the writers of this period. All attempts to be objective must hold Trotter's testimony in abeyance until corroborated since he is obviously determined to justify Darby, and his volume contains many prejudiced statements, and at times, false conclusions.



authority on the assembly. He maintains that he resisted Newton purely out of jealousy for the cause of Christ, not for personal reasons. He asserts that from the very beginning of the movement at Plymouth, Newton had exercised too much power; that he had attempted to warn him of the subsequent effect it would have on the assembly, but that Newton had persisted in usurping the position for selfish aggrandizement.<sup>1</sup>

Darby evidently saw what he terms "the rising tides of clericalism" in the practice concerning the Lord's table in which the speakers for the table always broke the bread and became recognized as leaders. Newton had become the leading brother according to Darby, and when he returned, Newton resented his presence.

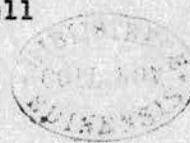
Darby charges that Newton did not want to cooperate with the other leaders; did not allow the other teachers to attend his meetings because he did not think it right for the taught to hear the authority of the teachers questioned; would not attend general "prophetic" meetings in Ireland, but set up his own meetings in Plymouth at the same time; and, in general, tried to isolate himself from the other brethren.

. . . I sorrowed over (this) as an unhappy trait of isolation, and the love of acting alone, and having his followers to himself; but I had no suspicion whatever of any purpose of any kind, bore with it as a failing of which we all have some, and left perfect liberty complete and entirely unentrenched on.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Darby must take at least a partial responsibility for this departure from the original principle of Brethrenism, for in earlier days he had urged Newton to "sit where he could hinder what was manifestly unprofitable and unedifying." Thomas Stewart Veith, The Story of the Brethren Movement (Edinburgh: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), p. 43. Darby addressed a letter to Newton from Dublin as "B. Newton, Esq. Elder of the Saints meeting at Raleigh Street, Plymouth." Tregelles, op. cit., p. 7. It is apparent even that on one occasion, Newton stopped a brother from ministry which he considered improper when Darby was present and apparently with his full concurrence. Tregelles, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts . . ., p. 21.



Some of the practices to which Darby objected were the custom of set days for certain speakers -- violating the principle of the freedom of the Spirit to 'exercise' a man to speak -- to the point that the people "knew when it was Mr. Newton's day or Mr. Harris's day;" the outright denial to someone the privilege of speaking by pulling him down, scraping of feet or leaving; the silence of the assembly when some brother would call out a hymn -- all of which seemed to him to be a deliberate attempt on the part of Newton to control the assembly.

The first evidence of strife between the two appears to be over a doctrinal issue concerning the status of the Church during the Great Tribulation. Darby taught that the entire Christian church would be raptured, and the witness during the Tribulation would be born by a semi-Christian group, who, though not a part of the Church, would be under a form of grace. He distinguished between the Church (Pentecost to Rapture) and the saints of the Old Testament, asserting that the Church had a special glory: that the Old Testament saints had an inferior relationship to God. To explain the witness of the last days, as set forth in the Gospels, he taught that this was given to the apostles, not as the founders of the Church, but as the representatives of the faithful remnant in the midst of an apostate Judaism. This involved a different view of the Gospels than that commonly held, and led to the practice of distinguishing certain parts of them as being "Jewish."

Newton, on the other hand, taught that the 'faithful' who were to be persecuted were simply the members of the Church who would be on the earth at the time of the Tribulation and that the Old Testament saints were an integral part of the Church, there being no "special glory" for the post-Pentecostal saints.



The real basis for the dissension, however, and the one which precipitated the strife, was the charge of sectarianism against Newton. Darby charged that he had contrived to band together many of the brethren over which he could exercise control and that he had usurped the power of "chief elder," a practice which he felt contrary to the principle of liberty in the Spirit, upon which Brethrenism was founded. The matter was precipitated when Darby returned to Plymouth from a deputation, and was greeted coldly by Newton who, after a brief personal call, wrote a letter stating that he would walk "peacefully, but separately."<sup>1</sup>

Darby replied, objecting to his "having acted very badly toward many beloved brethren, and in the sight of God."<sup>2</sup> Newton requested dates and names to which Darby replied that the practice of denouncing brethren was pure sectarianism. Newton answered (sarcastically, according to Darby) that this constituted a new charge and that he still wanted names and dates.<sup>3</sup> Darby declined further communication unless it was before the assembled brethren. Newton refused to meet what he termed a "jury," but agreed to meet informally with a selected number of the leading brethren, half of whom Darby could choose. Darby agreed to meet, but refused to select any adherents, believing this to be unscriptural.

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts, p. 22; Account of Proceedings, p. 159, f.n.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Darby considered this facetious inasmuch as Newton's effrontery in refusing to greet many brethren was widely known. "He had been writing for six years to every part of the globe . . . sisters had been employed in copying these letters; tracts had been published, declaring that all subverted the first elements of Christianity." Darby, Narrative of Facts, p. 30.

When called upon to state his objections, Darby demurred, but when pressed, charged "a systematic effort to form a sect, and, discrediting and denouncing those who do not adopt the opinions which form its basis."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Newton broke out in a great anger, saying that he waived all formal objection, that he did seek to make a focus of Plymouth, and that his object was to have union in testimony there against the other brethren . . . and that he trusted to have at least Devonshire and Somersetshire under his influence for that purpose.<sup>2</sup>

Darby stated that if this was true, and was unjudged by the assembly, he did not feel that he could worship with them the next Lord's Day.

Newton replied that he had no right to do so.

Two meetings after this produced nothing but fresh strife and contention, quibbling about whether Newton had referred to specific geographical areas, and whether he had said a purpose, or the purpose. The other brethren urged Darby not to press the charge, to which he agreed, and continued ministering for a while.

He later went to Somersetshire; J.L. Harris, who had supported him in his charge against Newton, went to Ireland; and Newton remained in Plymouth, where, according to Darby, he taught that there should be recognized teachers. Darby returned to Plymouth and ministered until Harris, returning from Ireland, protested against Newton's letters against the Irish brethren, at which time the party spirit was revived and Darby ceased ministering until it died down. He attempted to revive a Friday meeting,<sup>3</sup> but without

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>This was a meeting in which the mundane affairs relating to the work of the assembly had been informally discussed by the brethren, and which had, in earlier days, served as a 'spiritual clearing-house' for the business and discipline of the assembly -- on a purely non-authoritative basis. Darby charges that Newton had suppressed this meeting because it interfered with his quest for authority. Whether Newton deliberately suppressed it cannot be proved, but the group ceased to meet some months before the strife began.



success. After several attempts to settle the difficulty proved unavailing, on October 26, Darby

. . . detained the assembly and told them that it was a matter of deepest sorrow, but that I was going to quit the assembly; I felt it impossible to enter into details. It would have been a string of miserable facts. . . . I therefore refrained from them entirely, and only stated the principles on which I went; and more particularly, that there was subversion of the principles on which we met; that there was evil and unrighteousness unconfessed and unjudged . . . . I then left the assembly.<sup>1</sup>

After this action,<sup>2</sup> other of the leaders ceased ministering. Darby was requested to come before the whole assembly to state in detail why he had left. He records that Newton employed many friends and followers to make a canvass of the members of the assembly at their homes, urging them not to attend the meeting, making false issues and malicious statements about him, but that between two and three hundred people came. "I stated my reasons, and I can truthfully say, with the presence of the Lord and in grace toward all, I brought no accusation against Mr. Newton . . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Later several of the leaders sent a note to Darby requesting him to appoint four of his followers to meet four of Newton's to examine the charges. Darby refused on the ground that such procedure was not

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts . . ., p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Eight years later, Darby acknowledged that his action may have been hasty in one respect. Though denying that his act was not a deliberate one regarding the perversion of the principle upon which the assembly was formed, he admits that had he waited to see what effect the announcement of Harris (that he would no longer minister at Plymouth) would have had on the assembly, his actions may have been different. In every other respect, he positively affirms that he has no regrets for his act. J. N. Darby, Letter of Acknowledgement as to Plymouth, November 23, 1853, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, pp. 308-10.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts . . ., p. 62; Account of Proceedings, p. 224.

scriptural; that the matter should be brought before the entire assembly.<sup>1</sup> Newton gathered a group of partisans at his home to give his side of the division; such a meeting has been known as the "meeting of the ten."

Darby asserts that this was entirely without dependence upon the Spirit, citing the fact that the group was composed of men who were known to be followers of Newton; that one man, a Mr. N-r, whose loyalty to Newton was in question, was barred from the meeting. He accuses Newton of threatening "to produce in every gathering united hostility to the brethren's teaching who differed from him on points which were discussed."<sup>2</sup>

Darby maintains that this meeting was far from being an open investigation.

It is asserted that all the brethren who came acquitted Mr. Newton. The fact is this, after several had gone, Sir. A.C. drew up a paper, (signed subsequently by four others) going so far as ever they could in clearing Mr. Newton. This verdict was presented to Mr. N. to see if he would be satisfied with it. This was a strange procedure if it was a direct, definite result of a solemn investigation. Mr. Newton declared that he was ruined if it came out and that he would go to Canada. And the statement was withdrawn at his insistence. . . . A statement proposed to Mr. Newton, and rejected by him as ruining him, and therefore withdrawn, can hardly be alleged as a solemn acquittal by the brethren, five only having signed it, whatever it stated: the persons who drew it up having declared subsequently that anything like an open investigation was positively refused.<sup>3</sup>

When some of the brethren wanted to bring the charges before the assembly, they were told by Newton that the assembly had no authority to judge; that it was absurd for the untrained, the poor, to sit in judgement

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Account of Proceedings, pp. 166-67.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts, p. 73. If this statement is true, Darby must have heard it from another, for he was not present at the meeting.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, What Investigation Has There Been At Plymouth, Col. Writ., Eco. Vol. IV, p. 256.



upon the teachers. Darby waited for a call for the proposed meeting, but when it did not come, decided to break all connections with the Ebrington Street meeting (the meeting at Plymouth to which Newton was attached), and to set up his own 'table.'

I hesitated whether I should demand Raleigh St. and do it as a public testimony; but praying over it I felt the humble and more gracious way would be to do it for my own need. I procured a small room, knowing about six who wished to do it, for I had most carefully avoided seeking any, and had eventually ceased visiting, lest I should have the appearance of making a party . . . .

I began to break bread, and the first Sunday there were not six, but sixty.<sup>1</sup>

This happened on December 28, 1845.

Darby's account of the events leading to the division placed the responsibility almost entirely on Newton. A close examination of the facts, however, will suggest that Darby was partially at fault. The accusation that Newton attempted to gain personal authority over the assembly is supported by Newton's own admission, by the testimony of others,<sup>2</sup> and by the facts. However, Darby's action precipitated additional strife after the original division and set the pattern for continual division and strife among the Brethren long after Newton had retired from the scene.

Darby was not guiltless of the very thing with which he charged Newton, as may be seen from the testimony of Groves who contends that Darby was "pained and disappointed that Newton's influence was paramount in Plymouth;" that his position was "painful . . . since he was bent on ruling" when

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Narrative of Facts, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>S.P. Tregelles, Five Letters To The Editor of "The Record." (London: Houlston and Wright, 1864, 2nd. edition), p. 16. Of all the biographers of the early days of Brethrenism, Tregelles is without a doubt the most reliable, though brief. His personal integrity to facts, in addition to his outstanding scholarship, makes him an almost unimpeachable source.

an undisguised partisanship placed him in the minority.<sup>1</sup>

The strife continued throughout the following year. On January 11, 1846, Lord Congleton publicly accused Wigram at the Rawstrone Street meeting (in London) with assisting Darby in an unwarranted act of dividing the Plymouth meeting, admitting that a sectarian and clerical spirit existed, but that the division was not necessary. No action was taken, and he ceased breaking bread with them, "because they did not do all they could to prevent division."<sup>2</sup>

In April Congleton attended a meeting of the brethren "from other parts" in Rawstrone St. and again publicly charged,

. . . that Mr. Darby, after withdrawing from communion, Sunday, October 26, 1845, giving certain reasons, did publicly slander and defame, in Ebrington Street, Monday, November 17, 1845, his neighbor, his Christian brother and fellow minister in the Word, and thereby caused a breach and division in that gathering.<sup>3</sup>

Again no action was taken. In the weeks that followed continued accusations were brought against Newton by Darby and Wigram. Most significant of these was that a spirit of delusion from Satan was working at Plymouth. The spirit in which the controversy was carried out is indicated by Tregelles who

<sup>1</sup>Groves, op. cit., p. 32. Groves may be classed with Tregelles regarding his integrity as an honest reporter of facts. Never a partisan of either faction, he had earlier indicated his displeasure at Darby's tendency to dominate. As early as March 10, 1836, after spending fifteen months on furlough from his labors in the mission work of India, he wrote Darby counselling against the practice of taking chief place of judgement over the assemblies. This letter is significant in that it shows this tendency to be present in Darby long before the incident of division and prophetically predicts the course of action to be taken by Darby and Brethrenism.

Of Groves' integrity, Neatby, op. cit., p. 65, declares, "Groves . . . with his singularly pure, lofty and tender spirit . . . was essentially catholic, and he had to endure the grief . . . which to a man less pure from the taint of self-seeking would have been the bitter mortification -- of seeing another man enter into his labors and convert them to purposes that he abhorred."

<sup>2</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.



remarks, "This led to the course of action carried on against him by Mr. Darby and his associates, at first privately . . . then publicly. When all efforts to traduce the character of Mr. Newton had failed . . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Newton came to London to conduct some Bible readings and, stated that his errand to town was partly to meet any brethren who were wishful of information as to the charges brought against him in the Narrative of Facts. . . The Brethren to whom Mr. Newton had offered to give information proposed to him this open investigation.<sup>2</sup>

A letter was sent requesting him to come to Rawstrone Street to answer Darby's charges. He answered that he would be pleased to meet with any of the brethren, naming the hour and the date. Joseph B-r, answering for the brethren at Rawstrone Street, wrote,

The object of the note sent to you from the ten brethren yesterday was not to request that you meet those who signed it, as your note seemed to infer, but that you state when and where you intended to meet the saints publicly . . . and to which they request a direct reply.<sup>3</sup>

Newton replied that the meeting of the Ten had exonerated him, that the assembly at Plymouth had issued a similar statement<sup>4</sup> and that he did not feel it necessary to answer the charges publicly again.

<sup>1</sup>Tregelles, Five Letters, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Trotter, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Account of Proceedings, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup>Newton refers not only to the earlier decision of the meeting of the Ten, but to an investigation of four men who were appointed by the assembly at Plymouth. Darby charges, however, that these four men were known partisans and instruments of Newton (Darby, What Investigation Has Been Made at Plymouth, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, pp. 255-56); that none of them were present at Plymouth when the incidents to be investigated were happening - one of them was not converted until years afterwards, the other three did not come to the Plymouth assembly until later (Darby, Account of Proceedings, p. 209; Summary of Meetings in London, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 276, where the statement is attributed to Mr. H. - presumably J.L. Harris); and that the assembly merely accepted their decision without further investigation. (Darby, Account of Proceedings, p. 211). He further charges that Newton passed over several revered and respected leaders in choosing the four, and this proves that it was not a fair investigation. (Darby, What Investigation . . . Plymouth, p. 256)

Darby contends, however, that the decision resulting from the investigation of the ten brethren did not examine the "whole charge" against Newton, for, at the time they met, only two charges had been made.

I was called on to give my reasons to the saints why I seceded. In doing so I was obliged to state two particular things as to Mr. Newton, . . . but I carefully avoided mentioning anything that did not lead to my leaving, and hence mentioned only the two things as charged. . . . Lately . . . I felt bound to give a narrative of what had passed at Plymouth, and in this six or seven failings of the same kind appear, that is, four or five more graver (sic) than the two I already mentioned."<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, Newton had not answered all the charges brought against him, and hence the necessity for the proposed Rawstrone St. meeting, Newton's Defense having been first published in 1845, while the new charges of Darby's Narrative of Facts did not appear until 1846.

A second summons was sent by W.H. Dorman, requesting an immediate reply. W.H. Soltau, answering for Newton, sent a short reply indicating that a more detailed answer would be shortly forthcoming, but that the answer would be another refusal. Without waiting for the lengthy explanation,<sup>2</sup> Dorman informed the assembly that Newton had refused to answer the charges and must therefore accept their guilt; that he, Dorman, would no

<sup>1</sup>Darby, What Investigation . . . Plymouth, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup>In a letter to Mr. G-w, Dorman indicated that he could not read the reasons to the assembly. "At my declining, therefore, to read any reasons that may come to me for the saints at Rawstrone St. you must not be grieved, as it is only declining in act what I had already done by letter." (Darby, Account of Proceedings, p. 135). When called on to read the reasons in a later meeting, Dorman refused to do so, stating that they did not satisfy him. (Ibid., p. 138). In a letter to the leaders at Plymouth, Dorman and Henry G-h (possibly Gough) wrote, ". . . we beg to say that many of the statements are so entirely untrue, and its perversion regarding the course of action in question so very sad, that, for ourselves, we do not think that it would be the path of godly wisdom to read it to the saints . . ." Ibid., p. 234; Letter dated Dec. 22, 1846 and Jan. 8, 1847, Ibid., p. 247.



longer break bread with him.

A third note was directed to Newton to which he gave a most firm and decidedly negative answer as to a formal meeting, but reiterated his willingness to meet with any individual or group of individuals who acted only from the desire to obtain information without pressing formal charges. Consequently, Dorman and Gough signed a note on behalf of the Rawstrone St. assembly formally refusing him fellowship at the Lord's table.<sup>1</sup>

The injustice of this act is illustrated by the fact that Newton had not applied for fellowship at the Rawstrone St. assembly when the summons was first delivered; that the lengthy reply promised in the note by Soltau was never read before the assembly; that the action indicated in the 'excommunication' was far from being unanimous;<sup>2</sup> and that the spirit with which it was conducted was that of tenacious prosecution, not of a humble search for the Lord's will.<sup>3</sup> On this ground, Tregelles wrote a letter to the assembly in "protest against the character, objects, and competency for disciplinary action of the meeting . . . as being wholly contrary to the Word of God, and the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup>

A doctrinal aspect was added to the strife when two specific instances combined to give the Darbyites much ground for attacking Newton.

<sup>1</sup>The letter made it plain that the "congregation at Rawstrone Street do not express any judgement on the matter charged, but simply on the fact of your refusal." Darby, Account of Proceedings, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Even Darby admits that some who were present protested against the move.

<sup>3</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>Loc. cit.



The first charge, in 1846,<sup>1</sup> grew out of some notes taken by a listener of an address by Newton on Psalms 6.<sup>2</sup> These notes, not taken in short-hand, came into the possession of J.L. Harris, one of Darby's chief supporters. Without communicating to Newton to ascertain the validity of the notes, Harris wrote a tract severely attacking the doctrinal position indicated by the notes.

The gist of Newton's position was that as a man and an Israelite, Christ took upon himself the imputation of Adam's sin, and was therefore under wrath; that by obedience in this life he delivered himself from the wrath, and could thereby become the sacrifice for all men. He denied, as he was charged, that Christ's suffering on the cross was for his own atonement. His chief mistake seems to have been an over-zealous desire to identify Christ's humanity in every way with that of man.

Before replying to Harris's tract, Newton issued one of his own, Remarks on the Suffering of the Lord Jesus, in which he set forth his own position "repudiating ever having held the heretical doctrines, and fully vindicated himself of the charges thus unjustly imputed to him, but his enemies only took occasion therefrom to increase their accusations."<sup>3</sup> The injustice of Harris' tract, called a "work of darkness" by Muller, may be seen in the statement of Newton.

I never saw one line of these notes, nor indeed knew of their existence . . . until I heard that they were read and severely censured in a meeting convened in Exeter for that purpose. Shortly afterwards they were published, accompanied by strictures. . . . This was done without any communication having been made to me, and

<sup>1</sup>Neatby sets the date as 1847, but Tregelles, who was contemporary with the incident, establishes it as 1846. Three Letters, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>which were taken incorrectly. Tregelles, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.



therefore no opportunity was afforded me of avowing or disavowing any of the sentiments, or of rendering any explanation, or even of giving any judgement as to the accuracy of the notes.<sup>1</sup>

Darby replied with two tracts, Observations by J.N.D. on a Tract Entitled, 'Remarks on the Suffering of The Lord Jesus, and A Plain Statement of Doctrine on the Sufferings of Our Blessed Lord, in which he used expressions such as "hopeless dishonesty of author," "subverts the faith," "an affinity to Arianism," "Mr. Newton received his prophetic system by direct inspiration from Satan, analogous to the Irvingite delusion," "entire indifference to the truth and glory of Christ," "fatal error slurred and glossed over," "fatal ignorance of essential truth," and, "seducing spirit."

Newton published another tract, A Statement and Acknowledgement Respecting Certain Doctrinal Errors, in which he asserted,

I wish to explicitly state that I do not ascribe any of Christ's living experience to the imputation of Adam's guilt, nor ought I to have made any statement or used any words which . . . ascribe any of this suffering to anything imputed to him; nor yet that He had by keeping the law or by anything else to deliver Himself from such imputation or its consequences.<sup>2</sup>

Darby and his supporters considered this to be only a partial denial of his error, and published a Notice of the Statement, in which he declared Newton still to be guilty of doctrinal error.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>B.W. Newton, Observations on a Tract (Plymouth: Wright & Son), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>B.W. Newton, A Statement and Acknowledgement Respecting Certain Doctrinal Errors (Plymouth: Wright & Son, 1847), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>"It is to be remembered that this humble document was the work of a distinguished scholar and theologian, a Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. . . . If it be asked why so thorough a confession and withdrawal did not end the controversy, the answer must be that Mr. Newton's opponents had ceased to walk in love, and therefore carnal influences, such as bitterness, ambition, a party spirit overcame them." (sic) G.H. Lang, The Local Assembly (Suffolk: the author, 1942, 4th edition), pp. 63, 62.

A second charge of doctrinal error was brought against Newton soon after the first. In 1835, he had published a pamphlet against Irvingism, defending Christ's spotless humanity, but in which some of the relations in which our Lord stood to others were inaccurately set forth. In 1847, twelve years later, these statements were eagerly seized by some of his opponents and used against him. When the passages were brought before him, he attentively examined them, and realizing that he was in error -- that they might well lead to false conclusions -- he published a statement withdrawing them.

The original pamphlet appeared in the Christian Witness of April, 1835, and did not then contain the passages objected to. These passages were inserted at the request and with the approval of the leaders at Plymouth in order to meet certain Irvingite errors which had crept in, and reappeared in enlarged form in the second edition of the same magazine in 1838. It had been widely circulated among Brethren circles for twelve years and had been commended by practically all the leaders.<sup>1</sup> J.G. Bellett, one of the most able of the Darbyites, acknowledged that he had seen nothing wrong with it until the error was pointed out. The most objectionable statement in the article was later proved to be a quotation from Darby, and after this was revealed it was interpreted to mean something quite different.

The statements objected to did not refer to the person of Christ, but to certain relations in which he stood to Adam. Throughout the pamphlet he strongly maintained the true deity of Christ, his sinlessness, the

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<sup>1</sup>It was even edited by J.L. Harris, who brought the charges against Newton for his lecture notes on Psalm 6. (Trotter, op. cit., p. 22.)



purity and holiness of life, the entire voluntariness of his service and sufferings, and the substitutional character of his work.

He did not see, neither did the brethren who approved and circulated this pamphlet discover, until after twelve years had elapsed, the consequence that might have been deduced from these statements . . . . It is manifest from the pamphlet itself, as well as other writings, that Mr. Newton did not hold the heretical doctrines with which he was charged. He had stated certain views which might have led toward them, and when he saw what might be deduced therefrom, he fully, frankly and publicly acknowledged that he had made an inaccurate statement, and withdrew it . . . . The accusers of Mr. Newton are not to be blamed for pointing out an incorrect statement in one of his early writings . . . . but they are open to the severest censure for the bitterness and malice which characterized their accusations, and for attributing to him heretical doctrines which he never held.<sup>1</sup>

Though it cannot be denied that some of Newton's statements were not orthodoxically correct, even a casual perusal of the tracts written against him will reveal many mis-interpretations and distortions of facts. In one of these the author quotes Newton as saying, "Christ had in His nature not only a possibility and aptitude, but a necessity of dying," without acknowledging that these are not the words of Newton, but are quoted from Bishop Pearson in his work on the creed. Nor does this critic acknowledge that he has quoted only a portion of the statement; that the whole statement, taken in context, means something quite different.

For Christ, who took upon Himself all our infirmities, sin only exempted, had in his nature not only a possibility and aptitude, but also a necessity of dying; and as any extrinsical violence, able, according to the common course of nature, to destroy and extinguish in the body such an aptitude as is indispensably required to continue a union with the soul. He had no natural preservative; nor was it in the power of His soul, to continue its vital conjunction unto His body bereft of a vital disposition. . . . It is true that Christ did voluntarily die . . . . So not by necessary compulsion, but voluntary election, He took upon Himself the necessity of dying.<sup>2</sup> (*Italics not in original*)

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<sup>1</sup>Tregelles, Three Letters, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup>As pointed out in Letters on the Humanity of Jesus (London: Houlston and Wright, 1848, author not given), p. 20.

Newton's withdrawal of his statement did not end the painful controversy, but placed an instrument of advantage in the hands of his opponents, who used it as an admission of heresy, and referred to it as "mere cunning device," "the clever expediency of the enemy of souls in bringing about that which he can use to cloak our sins and blasphemy"<sup>1</sup> This merely increased the intensity of the campaign against Newton.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>It is not the intention of the author to justify Newton in every respect, but merely to present the facts. There is much in Newton's system that is as decidedly as wrong as in Darby's, but on the whole he has been much abused by his opponents, and in all fairness to him it must be pointed out that he was the victim of what was obviously a vicious and deliberate attack, of such a nature that it does no credit to those who launched it.

Neatby adequately expresses the case for Newton when he writes, "The execrations of his adversaries pursued him to his distant grave, but not once in a half century did they avail to provoke retaliation. His name to this day is regarded with absolute loathing by thousands who have never troubled to read a single tract of all he has written; and there are certainly hundreds, scarcely a whit better informed, who have made it one of their chief objects to perpetuate the frantic prejudice. But none of the leaders of this campaign of calumny, and none of their dupes, have ever, so far as I can learn from extensive enquiry, been assailed by Newton with one angry word of a personal character, or with one uncharitable imputation. With Newton's ecclesiastical course I have no sympathy. He contracted the limits of orthodoxy till there can scarcely have been more than five hundred sound Christians in all the world, and he taught principles of church-fellowship that were actually narrower than those of Darby himself. . . . As I know not where to turn for a parallel to usage so cruel and unrighteous as that from which Newton suffered, so I hardly know better where to turn to match such extraordinary forbearance as he displayed. If theological animosity could still restrain me from recognizing the grace of God in his conduct, I should feel that words were poor to express my admiration either of the dignity with which his path was chosen, or of the steadfastness of self-control with which it was pursued through all its bitter length. It seems to me that Newton ignored, all unwittingly, some of the most sacred principles of Holy Scripture; but the light of one text at least shone steadily on his path. when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he was persecuted, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously." Neatby, op. cit., pp. 152-53.



Newton subsequently left Plymouth, completely disassociated himself from the Brethren, and went to London and gathered a congregation, becoming the sole pastor, where he ministered until his health caused him to retire.

The effect of the controversy did not retire with him, however. As soon as he left Plymouth, Soltau, Balten, Dyer, Haffner, and other of his associates, confessed to clericalism,<sup>1</sup> and to unconsciously holding doctrinal errors, and withdrew from the Ebrington Street meeting.

Within a few weeks the assembly at Ebrington Street met to draw up a statement<sup>2</sup> of the position of the congregation regarding the error with which they had been connected. It disavowed any approval of errors concerning the person or nature of Christ, and affirmed in definite and

<sup>1</sup>Some of these confessions reveal what Newton's heresy was considered to be. Haffner stated, "The other point which he /Darby/ contested, viz, 'The practical denial of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church,' existed in Ebrington St, I am also fully assured of; and with sorrow, and deep abasement, confess my sin for having been unwilling to speak of it heretofore.

"My assurance of this arises from a conversation I had with Mr. Newton, just before leaving Plymouth, on the subject of preparation for the ministry; when he said, that, before coming to the Lord's table, he did not see it at all wrong to be prepared with what he had to say to the saints; that if they were in the right state, he believed that was the way God by His Spirit (the saints waiting on Him, and the teachers waiting on Him also, before coming) would teach, though he would always be subject to having his thoughts turned into another channel when at the Lord's table, if the Spirit so ordered it. This, beloved friends, shocked me very much, at the time, and shook my confidence: but oh! with what humiliation do I now appear in the presence of God, for having so long retained in my bosom the knowledge that our poor brother did thus practically deny the present leadings and guidance of the Spirit of God . . . without having called on others to join with me in prayer for him. . . ." T.P. Haffner, Confessions, as quoted by Tregelles, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>A Statement From Christians Assembling in the Name of the Lord in Ebrington Street, Plymouth. This statement did not satisfy some of the followers of Darby. Wigram answered by declaring of the meeting at Ebrington Street, "Rather would I go to the table of the Socinians or of the Unitarians than to it." J.E. Howard, A Caution Against the Darbyites (London: G.T. Stevenson, 1866), p. 36.

concise terms, probably worded by Dr. Tregelles, the orthodoxy of their own beliefs. This statement is significant in the light of subsequent events concerning the relation of the members of Ebrington Street to other Brethren.

It was not, however, sufficient for the followers of Darby, for, although Newton had removed himself from the scene the charge remained. A Colonel Woodfall moved from Plymouth to Bristol and was received into the fellowship of Bethesda, despite the objection of a few of Darby's friends who resisted the reception on the grounds that Woodfall was a friend of Newton. In the course of a public address at Exeter, Darby announced that he would not worship again at Bethesda because the Woodfalls were received, and later, upon the advice of friends, communicated this decision to Mr. Muller.<sup>1</sup>

The friends of Darby in the assembly at Bethesda agitated for an investigation of Newtonian errors, but the leaders firmly refused to do so. After continued insistence on their part, the assembly was finally called

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<sup>1</sup>A large section of the Brethren did not regard Bethesda as an "assembly of the Brethren." "Philadelphos" pointedly states that it was not. / Basis of Peace, A Supplement to "An Appeal to the Brethren, So-called," Being Observations on Doctrines Relating to the Person of Christ, on Mr. Darby's Views of the Third Class of Sufferings of Christ, on the Bethesda Question, Fellowship, etc. (Dublin: Stearn Printing Co., n.d., not published, for private circulation only), p. 13./ In a pamphlet published in 1849, it was referred to as "a Baptist or an Independent church." / W.H.F., What Are the Facts? An Affectionate Appeal to the Brethren, So-called (Dublin: Stearn Printing Co., n.d.), p. 20./ In Things Old and New, Vol. XVIII, (1875), p. 317, (author not given) it is described as a "congregation of Baptists meeting at Bethesda." Alexander Murdock, Life Among the Close Brethren (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890, Reprinted from the British Weekly), p. 48, quotes Thomas Leigh as saying, "It is a mistake to suppose that Bethesda was in any way an offshoot of the Plymouth gathering. Mr. Muller had been in the habit of breaking bread every week at Teignmouth while Mr. Darby was still preaching in the pulpit of the Church of England." (Philadelphos may be identified as W.H.F. In The Basis of Peace, he refers to having privately circulated a paper entitled, An Affectionate Appeal to the Brethren, cited above, which bears the imprint of W.H.F.)



together, and a letter representing the views of ten elders was read. It alleged that the assembly could not consent to an investigation since it was not for the good of the assembly to become entangled in the Plymouth controversy, and that Mr. Newton had repudiated his errors and therefore could not be held to be presently responsible for them. They stated,

Supposing the author of the tracts were fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant us in rejecting those who came from under his teaching, until we were satisfied that they understood and imbibed views essentially subversive of foundation-truths; especially as those meeting at Ebrington St, Plymouth, last January, put forth a statement disclaiming the errors charged against the tracts.<sup>1</sup>

Darby came to Bristol and again urged Muller to instigate an investigation, threatening to separate them from all other believers if they refused.<sup>1</sup> When they refused, he issued a circular on August 26, 1848, virtually excommunicating the entire assembly at Bethesda, and all other assemblies who received anyone who worshipped at Bethesda.<sup>2</sup>

This letter defined the motive of such action as "guarding the beloved sheep of Christ against the work and power of Satan." It charged that Bethesda's refusal to investigate the Newtonian error was virtually an acceptance of the error inasmuch as it allowed Newton's followers to come into fellowship without regard to their doctrinal beliefs. Darby ignored three salient facts: that Newton had retracted his error; that the assembly at Ebrington Street had asserted that it did not hold such

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Groves, Darbyism, Its Rise and Development, as quoted by Neathy, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Bethesda Circular, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 253.

error; and that Bethesda examined each candidate on individual merit.<sup>1</sup>

Darby instructs his readers,

Let this be maintained as I desire to maintain it . . . . I call on brethren by their faithfulness to Christ, and love of souls of those dear to Him, to set a barrier against this evil. Woe be it to them if they love the brethren Muller and Craik or their own ease more than the souls of saints dear to Christ! And I plainly urge upon them that to receive anyone from Bethesda . . . is opening the door now to the infection of an abominable evil from which at so much painful cost we have been delivered . . . . If this be admitted by receiving persons from Bethesda, those doing so are morally identified with the evil . . . . I shall neither go near Bethesda in its present state, nor while in that state go where persons from it were knowingly admitted (Italics not in original).<sup>2</sup>

The effect of this near-decreed was almost immediate. Most of the followers of Darby rejected even normal social contacts with the Bethesdaites, the division becoming apparent even within families and close relations.<sup>3</sup> The record of the strife generated by such a policy shows an appalling degree of disunity among the Brethren everywhere, to the extent

<sup>1</sup>Darby charges that many who held the Newton errors were admitted. "Now the public conduct at Bethesda has been indifference to blasphemies against Christ as the ground of communion, voted by the whole body and signed by the labouring leaders. They . . . receive persons who came from, and declare that they are and will continue to be in communion with, the bodies where the blasphemies are taught and were formed by and for the teacher of them. I will not inquire as to whether they hold them or not. (Italics not in original). In point of fact some, if not all, did hold these and were active in propagating them. . . . They do this in spite of remonstrances on every side, where the blasphemies were confessed and known, defended by their author, and confessed by those delivered." (Darby, Indifference to Christ: Bethesdaism Col. Writ., Doct. Vol. IV, p. 312).

Yet Philadelphos, The Basis of Peace, p. 24, relates that some candidates were rejected from fellowship because they believed some of Newton's errors. "As far as we have been able to ascertain, no individual holding the errors in question was ever admitted into communion at Bethesda; nor did any single individual in communion at Bethesda ever imbibe those errors." p.20.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Bethesda Circular, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup>Murdock, op. cit., et passim.



that allegiance to the party of Darby or of Muller became the watchword of fellowship, replacing allegiance to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The pressure on Bethesda was too great, and the leaders finally yielded in November, 1848, and resolved to examine Newton's tracts. Seven congregational meetings were held between November 27 and December 11 at which the tracts were examined page by page.<sup>2</sup> These deliberations produced the decision that, "no one defending, maintaining, or upholding Mr. Newton's views or tracts should be received into communion."<sup>3</sup> The decision emphasized that the basis of prohibiting communion was solely on adherence to the doctrine of Newton, not merely by being associated with him.<sup>4</sup> Soon afterwards,

<sup>1</sup>"The sins of tongue, and of pen, have sadly shaded the course of the controversy. The differences which arose furnished an opportunity of glorifying God by a manifestation of the tone and spirit in which we should contend for the faith. But . . . the manner in which the controversy has been conducted has called forth public rebuke in one of the most esteemed religious periodicals as having been marked by "inordinate virulence of spirit and language;" "un-Christian bitterness;" "violence and acrimony most painful to a Christian mind;" "it went far beyond the range allowed even by the world for the acerbity of controversy;" "they have set out with the boasting of their love; they have given churches from which they came out specimens of rancour seldom equalled;" Philadelphia, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Trotter, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

<sup>3</sup>A.N. Groves, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>W.H. Cole, as quoted by G.H. Lang, op. cit., p. 77 et seqq, asserts, from primary observation, that the 'excommunication decree' was not delivered until after this examination of Newton's tracts; that Darby expressed approval of Bethesda's action and considered it sufficient, but requested them to withdraw the letter from the ten elders from circulation and publish another tract announcing the conclusions of the examination; to which Bethesda replied that it had not published the "letter" (it being a private letter for the assembly only) and consequently it could not withdraw it, nor would it put its latest decision into public circulation. It is Cole's argument that Darby's decree of excommunication came as a result of Bethesda's refusal, and not because he was dissatisfied with their decision or refusal to investigate the errors. However, he is the only writer of this period who gives such information, so far as this research has been able to ascertain, and in the light of the singularly overpowering evidence to the contrary, it must be concluded that the decree came on the ground of Bethesda's refusal to instigate a public investigation, and before the decision referred to above.

however, Bethesda reverted to its earlier decision and admitted every person who reached its own standard of orthodoxy, irrespective of his ecclesiastical views.

This action did not unite the two factions, for Bethesda still adhered to its privilege of judging each person on individual merits, rather than past association. The ensuing days produced fresh strife. The Orchard Street assembly of London declined to comply with the decree that they refuse fellowship to anyone coming from Bethesda, and were promptly excommunicated. A.N. Groves, returned from his missionary duties in India, visited a meeting in Tottenham. Dorman notified John Howard, the leading elder at Tottenham, that since Groves was "identified with things at Bethesda,"<sup>1</sup> Tottenham was considered excommunicated. As a result of this action, Cronin, who had labored with Groves in unbroken intimacy and friendship for twenty years on the mission field in India, wrote to him and forbade him to enter his house.<sup>2</sup>

The foundation for a permanent division among the Brethren had been laid: a division which was to mold its character amidst internal strife and strip it of much of its virility. The principle of unity and tolerance, with which it had begun, was replaced by a principle of caustic examination of every theological difference, however minor, until absolute agreement and allegiance to one man was demanded. That man was J.N. Darby.

In the history of Christendom no man ever entertained so extravagant a conception of sacramental union. If Compton Street /the congregation previously designated as Ebrington St./ admitted Newton to communion, it became as Newton. If Woodfall took communion at Compton Street, he became as Compton Street, and therefore as Newton.

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<sup>1</sup>Probably by virtue of the fact that he was Muller's brother-in-law.

<sup>2</sup>Lang, op. cit., p. 27 fn.



If Bethesda had even excommunicated Woodfall, but had refused to excommunicate one of its own members who had taken communion somewhere else with Woodfall, it would become in the same completeness as Newton. If the Bath meeting, rejecting such a member of Bethesda, had admitted one of the other members to communion, it would have been in Newton's position also; so would Hereford Street, if it had resolved to refuse everyone from Bethesda, but to admit from Bath. To the remotest stage the penalty was exacted. Everyone that took the sacrament at a defaulting meeting was excluded from fellowship.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, two groups were clearly distinguished among the Brethren, and became known as Open and Exclusive, with Darby dominating the Exclusives.<sup>2</sup>

One of the prime factors in the control of his followers was the establishing of the London Central Meeting, sometimes called London Bridge or "Old Bailey." Observing that while the New Testament referred to churches it always referred to the church in a given city, as the church at Corinth, although there was decidedly more than one gathering in a city, Darby concluded that each gathering constituted only a segment of the local church, and could not take an ecclesiastical action without the concurrence of the other segments. To facilitate such action, he established the Central meeting, located in a hired room, and composed of representatives from the various assemblies of London and suburbs. This meeting met on Saturdays to settle all ecclesiastical problems of London for the following day - such as reception of candidates, details of finance, and excommunication of evil doers or persons who had fellowshipped at an excommunicated assembly. Subsequently, the decisions of the London Central Meeting be-

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<sup>1</sup>Neatby, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>The remainder of this historical survey, as well as the analysis of the doctrine of the church and the subsequent evaluation of its contribution, deals only with the Exclusive section of Brethrenism. The reader is cautioned that to attribute all of Darby's doctrine of the Church to the Open section would pointedly be in error, there being essential differences which lie outside the province of this study.

came binding on the whole of Brethrenism.<sup>1</sup>

An example of the power of this meeting is evidenced in the "Walworth-Sheffield" discipline of 1864. The assembly at Walworth moved its place of meeting to Peckman (becoming known as Walworth-Peckman) without previous permission from the London Central Meeting, and were promptly excommunicated. Subsequently, a member, Goodall, was accepted for fellowship by the Sheffield assembly, which communicated its action to the Rotterdam assembly. It was excommunicated by that assembly on the ground that it had ignored the decision of the Central meeting. The wording of the communication, dated November 29, 1863, illustrates the extreme discipline exercised over the various assemblies.

I am requested to say, that inasmuch as you have now placed yourself in the same position as Mr. G., viz:- outside the communion of the saints gathered in the name of Christ in London, the gathering in Rotterdam being in fellowship with those in London, cannot receive any statement of the particulars of the matter, either written or by word of mouth. To do so they feel would be to ignore the discipline of the assembly in London, and practically to set aside discipline everywhere; as it virtually denies the unity of the body, and reduces every assembly to an independent congregation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The session became a private one, "sometimes meeting behind closed doors, exercising absolute power, assuming . . . infallibility under the guise of 'the leading of the Holy Ghost.'" (Howard, op. cit., p. 30.) "From this meeting, a weekly paper was issued, ostensibly for the purpose of giving information of the names of persons proposed for and received to fellowship; and also for making known acts of discipline . . . in any of the assemblies it represents. It is symbolic of the unity which belongs to the gatherings where it goes: where it does not go unity is not admitted . . . limiting the unity to the fifteen or sixteen gatherings, and fellowship to the circuit which this paper takes. /G. Goodall, Letters Relating to the Recent Excommunication of Assemblies (Sheffield: Spurr, 114 West St., n.d.)/ p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Letter dated November 29, 1863, signed C.S. - probably Charles Stanley - as quoted in Howard, op. cit., p. 32.



Darby's comment on the matter, written from the south of France, dated February 19, 1864, is typical of the absolute sway which he held over his followers for many years.

. . . He is rejected in London . . . . I take part in this act, and hold him to be outside the church of God on earth, being outside (in either case) what represents it in London . . . . I come to Sheffield; there he breaks bread and is -- in what? Not in the church of God on earth, for he is out of it in London, and there are not two churches on earth . . . . you have deliberately condemned the gathering in London, and rejected its communion.<sup>1</sup>

Darby's hold over the Exclusive Brethren began to wane with the loss of his chief supporters, either by death or division. By 1865 most of the original group of men who met in Dublin in the early days of Brethrenism had passed from the scene. Groves, Muller, Harrie and Newton had been excommunicated, Bellett and Craik had died, and the ensuing ten years were to bring about more division.

In 1865 two more of Darby's chief supporters, W.H. Dorman and Capt. Hall, withdrew after a lengthy correspondence over Darby's doctrine of the humanity and sufferings of Christ. This doctrine, first developed through the channels of the Bible Treasury, was strangely like that for which Darby had condemned Newton. It taught that Jesus was under wrath and indignation; smitten of God under a "governmental wrath" by which he would have suffered a mortal death had it not been for the Cross; divided the sufferings of Christ into "classes" for various groups of people; and in general, affirmed the federal imputation of Adam's guilt to Christ -- an almost identical

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<sup>1</sup>Letter addressed to Mr. Spurr, a member of the Sheffield assembly, as quoted in Neatby, op. cit., p. 225.

expression used by Newton.<sup>1</sup>

Dorman wrote to Darby about his doctrine, questioning its orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup> An examination of the correspondence reveals a sincere attempt on Dorman's part to deal with the problem in all fairness to Darby. He expresses his devotion for Darby, his motive in writing, his prayers for Darby's guidance by the Lord. Darby promised to reconsider the matter, but after waiting for months, Dorman became aware that he was not withdrawing,<sup>3</sup> but continually affirming, his doctrine. Persuading nine of the leaders in London "to sign the whole doctrine [Darby] thus sent it accredited as far as their names could accredit it."<sup>4</sup>

Dorman affirmed a position which he assumed earlier in the correspondence, to wit:

This is . . . my exact case; I cannot any longer be exposed by the exigency of my position, to be called upon to refuse solicited fellowship to Christians, in other respects upright and blameless, not because they hold Mr. Newton's doctrine, or have the least leaning toward it, but because they cannot abjure all association with those who at some time or other have been connected with Newton's doctrine;— while at the same time more than fear that there is such an approximation of your own doctrine toward it . . . .<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Supporters of Darby made an attempt to trace the historical continuity between this view and that which Darby held at the time he was condemning Newton. However, Darby's own statement refutes this for he admits that the doctrine is not only new to his readers, but to himself as well. /Tertius, Divers and Strange Doctrines (London: Houlston & Wright, n.d.), p. 35./

<sup>2</sup>W.H. Dorman, The Close of Twenty-Eight Years Association With J.N. Darby (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1866, 2nd. edition), p. 3, et. passim.

<sup>3</sup>Not only did Darby not withdraw his statements, but in a subsequent tract, stated, "I am not senseless enough to maintain that a pen purely human and feeble may not have expressed itself badly on such subjects, but I see nothing at all to retract from the statements themselves." J.N. Darby, The Nonatoning Sufferings of Christ (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Dorman, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 8.



Darby's reaction was typical -- Dorman was excommunicated, along with Capt. Hall, who shared his view. He attributed their action to the work of Satan.

During the sixties and seventies, the Exclusives experienced a renewed vigor and zest which produced a large influx of new adherents, mostly young men gathered from the Established church. In 1866, J.E. Howard affirms, "the sickly existence of Darbyism has been reinvigorated by young blood from the 'revival movement'"<sup>1</sup> In 1875, a Scots minister wrote, ". . . they are perhaps increasing even more solidly than any; for their numbers are being constantly augmented by drafts of the most spiritual, intelligent, conscientious, decided, and devoted from all churches . . . ." <sup>2</sup> Among the most outstanding leaders in this movement within Brethrenism appear the names of C.H. Mackintosh, Andrew Miller, and Charles Stanley. During most of this period Darby was in deputation work: during the late 1860's he was in Germany, in 1871 in Italy, 1872 in USA, in 1875 in New Zealand, and in 1879 on the isle of Pau.

This influx of new blood into the movement was precisely one of the factors which caused the disintegration of Darby's supremacy over the body, for they were not enamoured with his doctrines nor under complete sway of his magnetic personality. In the events which followed they felt a freedom to disregard his decrees.

Another factor which contributed to this disintegration was the formation of a party-within-the-party, or New Lumpism,<sup>3</sup> as it was called.

<sup>1</sup>Howard, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Literature and Mission of the So-called Plymouth Brethren, as quoted in Neatby, op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>3</sup>I Corinthians 5:7, "purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened . . ."

Principle tenet of this group was a move for a more "spiritual" element within Brethrenism, bemoaning the "increasing worldliness" and advocating admission to the Lord's table on evidence of "spiritual maturity." It arose primarily as a reaction against the new recruits from the 'revival' movement who were not indoctrinated with Brethren doctrine.

Darby resisted this move, for it represented a threat to his supremacy. Subsequent events were to prove that his resistance led to adverse results. It is important to note that, at first, no new assemblies were formed, and New Lumpism operated within the Exclusive assemblies.

Immediate precipitation of division involved one of the venerable old men of Brethrenism: Dr. Edward Cronin. The assembly at Ryde had long been in Darby's disfavor, since they had refused to judge a member for illegal marriage. However, a new assembly had been established in the home of a young clergyman, a Mr. Finch, a friend of Cronin, who, after leaving the Established church, had been received by the Brethren in London. When Dr. Cronin went to Ryde he fellowshipped with his friend in the new assembly; repeated the act several times in the following weeks and advised the group to transfer its place of meeting to the Masonic Hall. He informed the Kennington assembly, his regular place of meeting, of this action and communicated it to Darby as well.

On the pretext that this new assembly had not been recognized by the London Central Meeting,<sup>1</sup> a clamour was raised for the excommunication of both it and Dr. Cronin, even though Darby had declared of the old assembly, known as Temperance Hall, "Never will I set my foot in that

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<sup>1</sup>Now moved to Cheapside, and known as the Cheapside meeting.



unclean place. I have known it for twenty years to be a defiled meeting."<sup>1</sup> The London Central intimated to the Kennington assembly that it would be excommunicated if it did not take action against Dr. Cronin. Darby wrote from Pau, "The course of Dr. Cronin has been clandestine, untruthful, dishonest and profane,"<sup>2</sup> and thereby injected a moral charge into the discussion. Later, January 5, 1881, he wrote to Cronin to the effect that if he would admit his error he would be restored to favor. Cronin replied, asking if Darby was prepared to withdraw, instead of just dropping, the moral charge. Darby's answer made no mention of the charge, and when Cronin replied noticing the omission, the correspondence ceased, and the efforts to seek excommunication were pushed relentlessly.

The Kennington brethren issued a statement on April 28 to the effect that they had no fellowship with Cronin's act, or with the assembly he had visited. It was not, however, an act of excommunication, and was rejected by the Central Meeting. A more formal censure, but still not an excommunication, was passed at Kennington and rejected at London. After much pressure, on August 19, the Kennington assembly addressed a letter

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<sup>1</sup>G. Kenswick, An Explanation of the Principles and Practices of the Park Street Confederacy, (publisher not given), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Letters from Pau. It is difficult to find the grounds for such a charge since Cronin had been open in all his actions. Darby had previously intimated that he had planned to go to Ryde and open a new assembly. /G. Balding, Epitome of the Ramsgate Sorrow (London: G. Balding, Clapham, Surrey, 1882, 2nd. edition), p. 3. In a letter to Mr. Finch, May, 1879, he stated, "I had hoped, when God opened the way, to have done what you speak of: whether it is now possible I know not." Murdock, op. cit., p. 96.

to "the assembly of God in London" stating,

After long waiting and prayerful consideration, and the failure of all previous action by the assembly, and admonition, we are sorrowfully compelled to declare Dr. Edward Cronin out of fellowship until he judges and owns the wrongness of his act at Hyde.<sup>1</sup>

For months, Cronin sat in a back seat in the meeting, out of fellowship, weeping.<sup>2</sup>

The Priory assembly,<sup>3</sup> also known as Park Street, moved to disown fellowship with Cronin, to excommunicate the Kennington assembly for its failure to judge him without coercion, and the London Central (Cheapside) because it had not taken more definite action. However, Darby suppressed the Priory decision and forced the Central meeting to accept the Kennington action.

Peace was not to be restored, however, for the Ramsgate assembly moved to concur in the Priory decision, apart from the disowning of the Central Meeting, and when four of its leaders dissented, others withdrew and formed a separate assembly.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, there were two assemblies: the seceders being known as Guildford Hall and the others as Abbott's Hill.

In the months that followed the Ramsgate question became a source of severe criticism and division. Parties formed rapidly, threatening the complete disintegration of Brethrenism. Darby found himself in disagreement with both groups: with Abbott's Hill because it refused to censure Cronin,

<sup>1</sup>G. Balding, Epitome of the Ramsgate Sorrow. Dates and Facts, with a Few Notes By the Way (London: G.B. Ferndale Rd., Clapham, Surrey, 2nd. edition, 1882), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Stuart Veitch, The Story of the Brethren Movement (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Important because it was the assembly at which Darby worshipped when in London.

<sup>4</sup>Balding, op. cit., pp. 13-15.



and with Guildford Hall because, in principle, their secession threatened to divide his constituency.

The controversy was prolonged through the winter until April, 1881, when Priory (Park Street) and many other assemblies voted to recognize the seceders, Guildford Hall, and notified the Central Meeting (Oheapside) to this effect. There is no doubt that the action of the Priory assembly was prompted by Darby, for he had stated that he would leave the Priory if Abbott's Hill was recognized.<sup>1</sup>

On May 8, 1881, Abbott's Hill ceased breaking bread in an effort to form a reunion with Guildford Hall. The latter demanded that each member should make individual application for restoration and confess his sin. Refusing to do this, Abbott's Hill resumed breaking bread on July 12 and the division was irrevocably cemented.<sup>2</sup> As in the Bethesda controversy, recognition of Guildford Hall became the test of fellowship for Brethrenism.

Other assemblies were involved in the controversy of recognizing the decision of Park Street (Priory). "Bowling to Park Street" became the criterion for fellowship, even though the principle involved in establishing the Central Meeting decreed that no local assembly had authority. It is important to note that, although Darby levied the threat of total excommunication against all assemblies which did not follow the decision, there were many which did not do so, and openly fellowshiped with Abbott's Hill.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 42. See also for general information on Darby's general attitude toward this move, Letters of J.N.D. (London: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, n.d.), Vol. II, pp. 477, 481; Vol. III, pp. 2, 3, 5, 8-10, 24-30, 37-38, 42, 44, 48, 57, 76, 79, 82, 89, 97, 112, 115, 143, 161, 201, 206, 211, 213.

<sup>2</sup>Balding, op. cit., p. 47.

Prior to 1860 there were few who would have dreamed of defying a Darby edict, but the loss of chief supporters through death and excommunication, coupled with the influx of new members through the revival of the 1860-70's, had lessened his hold on his constituency and disintegration was all but complete.

Darby died on April 29, 1882, in his eighty-second year. With his passing the chief dominating power was lost, and division continued at a rapid rate.<sup>1</sup> Not until the Reunion conferences of 1926 did real unity among the Brethren come into force, when the efforts of many who had long prayed for a restoration of its original unity were realized in part.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>An enumeration of the other divisions and subsequent history of Brethrenism is not necessary for the purpose of this dissertation. However, for the facility of the reader who would like to pursue the study of the history of the movement, the author is donating to the Evangelical Library, 28A Chiltern Street, London, where it may be obtained on loan through the post, his copy of Napoleon Noel's The History of the Brethren (Denver: W.F. Knapp, 120 West Maple Avenue, 1936), 2 Vols., which Prof. F.F. Bruce, in reviewing, has termed "indispensable" to the student of Brethrenism.

<sup>2</sup>This is not to suggest a decline in the strength or influence of Brethrenism, though obviously the loss of its first leaders has weakened the movement. Since the Brethren do not count "membership," an estimate of its numerical strength, either at its most influential times or at present, is made difficult. However, Noel, op. cit., pp. 734-35, estimates the total number of assemblies from 1826 to 1926, not counting assemblies who meet on the same principle as, but independent of, the Brethren, as around 4,560. An accurate account of the present numerical strength is difficult to ascertain. Noel, op. cit., p. 733, quotes Whittaker's Almanac, London, 1935, as placing the number of "Brethren" in Britain in 1926 at 80,000. In America, the 1950 Religious Census records Brethren "membership" as 25,806, ranking 77th of 101 Protestant religious groups of over 10,000 adherents. /"State of the Church," Christian Herald (New York: Christian Herald Association, Inc., 27 East 39th. St.), August, 1951, p. 28./ Noel, loc. cit., estimates the assemblies in Germany as 700, but this is a pre-war estimate, and Brethrenism, as a separate "body," became extinct under the Hitler regime, for, having no creed or ecclesiastical confession, it was necessary for it to unite, legally at any rate, with the Baptists to preserve its prerogative of worship. (This information was revealed to the author by a German believer in the summer of 1951.)



## CHAPTER III

### THE NATURE AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

The true church, composed of the whole number of regenerate persons from Pentecost to the first resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52), who gather in the name of Christ, united together to Christ by the baptism of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:12,13) is the body of Christ of which he is Head (Eph. 1:22,23) and the holy temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit (Ep. 2:21,22). The Church exists as God's assembly on the earth,<sup>2</sup> into which the redeemed are gathered as a testimony to God, an inheritance for Christ, and an avenue through which the Holy Ghost works in the heart of man.

### THE CHURCH IN RUINS

From this definition of the nature and purposes of the Church, Darby surveys the ecclesiastical scene of his day, both Established and Dissenting, and makes one bold pronouncement: "The Church is in ruins."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The reader is reminded of the limitations which the author has imposed upon himself (as stated in the introduction) of being selective instead of comprehensive in presenting his material. He reiterates that he proposes to select what is distinctively different in the system of Darby, leaving untouched the areas in which he agrees in the main with Reformed Theology. The reader should not expect either a statement of the doctrine in the usual manner, or an exhaustive statement of all that Darby wrote on the subject.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, God, Not the Church, the Teacher of His Word, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 361.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, On the Formation of Churches; Further Developments, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 303. This statement is one of the most often asserted in his volumes on Ecclesiology, and one to which he repeatedly turns to answer any argument relative to the church as it exists in governmental form.

The pristine purity of the Church as instituted by Christ has become corrupted by the orders and government of man. The universal priesthood of all believers has been usurped by the establishment of professional pastors; unconverted men are allowed to hold offices which have been instituted by man, not Christ; the presidency of the Holy Spirit has been perverted by man, and in its place believers look to the guidance of a man-made ministry; the bond of communion has been broken; in general, the fellowship which was to reflect the glory of Christ -- simple, direct, Spirit-filled -- has been replaced by a system which bears the impress of the corrosion of the evil of the years; one filled with human agency.<sup>1</sup>

Man has organized, but he has wholly set aside, as far as arrangements go, God's order and arrangements as to the assembly. Thus the Church, God's assembly, is set aside to have churches; the Spirit, who gives gifts to various members, to have a minister of their own choosing; and the Word in which God's order is revealed. The Church, Spirit and the Word are all set aside by what is called order, that is, man's arrangement and organization.<sup>2</sup>

The church has lost its unity, its power, its holiness, and has ceased to bear witness to God in the world. What is called the church has become the center and power of evil and pretense.<sup>3</sup> The members of Christ's body are dispersed: many hidden in the world, others in the midst of religious corruption -- some in one sect, some in another -- in rivalry with one another.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p.32.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Churches and the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p.487.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 127.



What is called the church has broken up by its own decrepitude, by the contradictory principles it contains within itself, and by the absence of all power of self-government.<sup>1</sup> Its ordinances have been perverted, its orders and all spiritual arrangements forsaken and destroyed;<sup>2</sup> outward form and constitution has superseded spiritual administration,<sup>3</sup> because it has forsaken the principles upon which it was founded by Christ. It has failed because it has ceased to maintain the unity of the Spirit, and consequently the unity of the body.<sup>4</sup>

In the so-called church of today, ministry has become a worldly ordinance in which a clergyman is a minister irrespective of and without reference to any grace or gift; the office is derivative of man, and thus the nominal authority of God's office is attached to every error, unbelief and evil within the church; the Spirit of God has been totally rejected as to the guidance of worship, thus the worshipper has no direction or contact with God; indiscriminate communion of believers and unbelievers proclaims the positive compatibility of unholiness and Christian privilege, becoming automatic by canon law and ecclesiastical practice - the sanction for ungodliness in the church, the nursery of apostasy in the midst of believers; unsoundness of doctrine insures an improper balance of spiritual growth; the association of forgiveness and regeneration with the visible signs of

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Review of a Sermon, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 399.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, A Glance at Various Ecclesiastical Principles, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. II, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, The Nature and Unity . . . Christ, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 459.

admission - baptism and the sacraments - precludes the purity of "believers only" in the church; and its members meet as members of a parish, not as members of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

. . . Satan having beguiled the Church, the church is in the position of earthliness and united in system with the world: he has got it while it was in its low state, tied down by its own will first, then by actual bonds into the unhallowed union which makes it a bar, and a hindrance to the Spirit of God. . .<sup>2</sup>

This ruin in which the church finds itself is not merely one of denominational division; it is one in which the entire nature and purpose of the church has become so perverted that it is diametrically opposed to the fundamental reason for which it was instituted.<sup>3</sup>

Cause of this corruption is man's failure to apprehend fully his relation to Christ: a relation of obedience and glory. Man has sought his own verities instead of the glory of Christ: he has attempted to erect a system instead of keeping the deposit of truth that was entrusted to him.<sup>4</sup>

This has led to division and disunity. The church is filled with conflicting ideologies and principles which dissipate the glory of Christ. The church -- once beautiful, united, heavenly -- has lost its character, is hidden in the world; and the Christians themselves are worldly, covetous, eager for riches, honor, power -- like the children of the age.<sup>5</sup>

Hence the church, as the visible form of Christ's body, has lost its original state -- it no longer exhibits the visible unity where the Holy Spirit displays His power so that the grace of Christ might be manifest in it.

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to a Tract, Entitled, "Our Separating Brethren," Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 225, et passim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p.456.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, On the Formation of Churches, p. 314.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, What Is the Church, p. 130.



It is not merely that the Church has become corrupted, and has lost its effectiveness. The church is in ruins! It has become a corrupt mass -- an apostacy hastening to its final consummation--instead of a church or dispensation which God is sustaining through his faithfulness of Grace.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit is not owned as its power; unity in the sense of a visible body on earth is lost; the sense of responsibility to be one as a testimony on the earth has been erased; its spiritual character has been replaced; its principle of action as to the workings of the Spirit has been laid aside and replaced by a human system, which does not recognize the action of the members of the aggregate of the body.<sup>2</sup>

I fully recognize that there was an organization in apostolic and scriptural times, but affirm that what now exists is not the scriptural organization at all, but mere human invention, each sect arranging itself according to its own convenience, so that as an external body, the Church is ruined; and though much may be enjoyed of what belongs to the Church, I believe from Scripture that the ruin is without remedy, that the professing church will be cut off.<sup>3</sup>

Darby regards the church as a dispensation which, with all other dispensations, has failed and must suffer the judgement of God. As Adam fell; as Noah sinned after building an altar of thanksgiving; as the Israelites made a golden calf immediately after God spoke to them out of the midst of fire; as the sons of Aeron offered strange fire; as the son of David turned to idolatry and the kingdom was ruined -- as all of man's relation with God; law, priesthood, kingdom, covenant, has failed -- just so has

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Apostacy of the Successive Dispensations, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Thoughts on the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 523.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, What the Christian Has Amid the Ruins of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. III, p. 417.

man corrupted the church.<sup>1</sup> As Israel has been cut off, so will the church; and as a remnant will be saved out of Israel, so there is hope that a remnant may be used to glorify Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This corruption of the church has been predicted from the beginning: in fact, the church began to be corrupted soon after its inception. "The failure of the outward professing church is a positive declaration of scripture . . . that perilous times would come in the last days."<sup>3</sup> John states there were antichrists in his day; Peter declares that time has come for judgement to begin at the house of the Lord; and Paul found evil men and seducers already creeping in. Corruption of the purity and unity of the church began in its early days, and it has been continuously in a decline until it is now in ruins.<sup>4</sup>

The first Epistle of John shows the church in ruins . . . that it was in the church that the anti-Christ was to arise, and, that this evil already existed in the days of the apostles. It was indeed the last time, for this moral character, this essential character, was already there. The Church ought to have been the perfect testimony of what Christ is; whereas it had become the cradle of corruption -- the formal denial of Christ . . . .<sup>5</sup>

These manifestations of corruption are mere signs of

. . . a principle at work which should be consummated in the man of sin -- of a principle which involved the dispensation in apostacy and excision . . . a principle then operating, and thereby affording an opportunity to the apostles to forewarn the Church; and by their authority enabling us to say, that the last times were then come, though there might be a prolonging of mercy.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Church, the House, and the Body, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on the State of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 362.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 396.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, On the Apostacy. What Is Succession a Succession Of?, Ecc. Vol. I, p. 182.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, Thoughts on the Church, p. 525.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, On Apostacy . . . Succession, p. 183.



That the church is responsible for its present state of corruption and ruin is beyond question.<sup>1</sup> Its entire history has been a deviation from its true principles. It has become consumed with "making a system;" with seeking human leadership; with desire for numbers instead of genuine converts; with human righteousness, ordinances, succession, ceremonial observances, professional ministry, carnal procedures -- confusing spiritual administration with human imagination.

It has not been faithful to the command of Christ to glorify him; has not sought the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit; has not committed itself to the task of obedient service in His kingdom, but rather, has contented itself with the luxuries of a vast and complex system of orders instead of freedom in the Spirit; pastoral supervision instead of the priesthood of all believers; governing bodies and boards instead of the presidency of the Holy Spirit; ritual instead of simple and direct exercise of the soul toward God; ecclesiastical ethics instead of obedience to God's command; pomp and pretense instead of humbleness of soul; and derived authority instead of the gift of God to minister.<sup>2</sup> It has given itself to an adulation of everything which supports the interest of class and party, at the expense of faith, the action of the Spirit, the Word, and truth.

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Baptism Not Communication of Life, Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 408; Darby, Remarks on the State of the Church, p. 362.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Character of Office in the Present Dispensation, Ecc. Vol. I, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Holy Ghost in the Church, Doc. Vol. I, p. 331.

What then is the future of the church? As a dispensation it has failed; it has lost its place in God's economy; it will be judged on that account, although the faithful within the church are sure of being saved.<sup>1</sup>

We insist on the fact that the house has been ruined, its ordinances perverted, its orders and all its arrangements forsaken or destroyed; that human ordinances, a human order, have been substituted for them; and, what merits all attention of faith, we insist that the Lord . . . is coming soon in His power and glory to judge all this state of things.<sup>2</sup>

As God has cut off other dispensations, so will He do with the church. Because of its iniquity and apostasy, God cut off Israel as regards the covenant,<sup>3</sup> but took out of it a remnant, which became the Church. In the same way, "what concerns the church on earth, the house of God through the Spirit, it will exist no more."<sup>4</sup> However, "Christ has attached its practical operations to two or three, and owns them by His presence. He has provided for its maintenance. Thus, in all states of ruin it cannot cease, till He ceases to be the Head, and the Holy Spirit to be as the Guide and Comforter sent down."<sup>5</sup> Failure though there may be, the church still is His dwelling-place, and will ever be.<sup>6</sup> The remnant to be taken from the church in ruins is to be the Assembly of God.

The believer has a responsibility to this church in ruins, and determining that responsibility presages his action in the light of God's economy. The believer should not work for a restoration - a purification -

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Remarks on the State of the Church, p. 362.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, A Glance . . . at Principles, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Power in the Church: or, Not Imitation, but Obedience in the Sense of Present Ruin, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 459.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, What Is the Church, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, Two Letters As to Plymouth, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup>J.N. Darby, The Church, an Habitation of God Through the Spirit, Col. Writ., Evangelistic Vol. I, p. 365.



of the church in its primitive form.

Any attempt to restore the church will result in utter failure, since it is neither in God's will that the church be restored, nor does man have the authority to do so; he is utterly incapable.<sup>1</sup> All efforts to repair the ruins are not only sinful, but quite beyond the strength of the churches.<sup>2</sup> God has never restored a fallen dispensation to its original state, but always proceeded to a new medium of dealing with man.<sup>3</sup> Man cannot begin the church again, for God is not beginning it.<sup>4</sup>

[Scripture does not/ present the restoration of a dispensation; it never justifies its actual condition; though grace may . . . effect revivals during the long suffering of God, the dispensation, as such, is actually gone, that the glory of the principle contained in it may shine forth in the hands of the Messiah. The attempt to set this dispensation on another footing, as to its continuance . . . shows ignorance of the principles of God's dealing . . .<sup>5</sup>

To attempt to re-establish the church on its original basis is to act in the wisdom and strength of man without regard to God's will.<sup>6</sup> It is precisely the sin of man in attempting to regulate and direct the church, instead of depending on the leadership of the Holy Spirit, that has brought about this failure of the church, and all efforts to restore it would inevitably follow the same pattern which produced its failure. To think of restoration is pointless, at any rate, for God has already pronounced judgment upon the ruins of the church.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On the Formation of Churches, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p. 455.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Scriptural Views on the Subject of Elders, in Answer To a Tract Entitled "Are Elders to be Established." Col. Writ., Ecc. IV, p. 287.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Ephesians, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 508.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, The Apostacy of Successive Dispensations, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, On the Formation of Churches, p. 222.      <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

"Obedience to God, and not imitation of the apostle" is the duty of the believer as he views this ruined and condemned church.<sup>1</sup> God has given the believer instructions; "from such turn away;"<sup>2</sup> "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers;"<sup>3</sup> "purge the vessels of dishonor;"<sup>4</sup> and "depart from iniquity."<sup>5</sup>

Two great principles remain for the sincere Christian. It is positively stated (2 Tim. iii) that the church would fail and become as bad as heathenism; and the Christian is directed to turn away from evil and turn to the scriptures, and Christ (Rev. ii and iii) is revealed as judging the state of the churches, and the individual is called to listen to what He says as to judging the churches; so that the church cannot have authority over the Christian, for he is to listen to Christ judging it.<sup>6</sup>

Believers are to forsake the government and order of man which has corrupted the church, and assemble in simple unity.<sup>7</sup> "Our business is not to originate a church of the present or future, but to cleanse the church God has made, and consequently to confess the sin of all rivals, to repudiate them, and to come out from them."<sup>8</sup> The only true course for believers is to withdraw from all religious societies called "churches," and meet 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' -- to call together the true assembly of God.

He has told us when the church was become utterly corrupt, as He declared it would, we were to turn away from all this corruption and those who were in it, and turn to the scriptures which 'are able to make the man of God wise unto salvation.'<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Loc cit.    <sup>2</sup>2 Tim. 3:5    <sup>3</sup>2 Cor. 6:14    <sup>4</sup>1 Cor. 6:9    <sup>5</sup>2 Tim. 2:19

<sup>6</sup>Darby, God, Not the Church, Teacher . . . Word, p. 379.

<sup>7</sup>Darby, On Formation of Churches, p. 225.

<sup>8</sup>J.N. Darby, Lectures on the Church of God, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup>Darby, God, Not the Church, Teacher . . . Word, p. 366.



Separation itself is not enough: it has in it no uniting power. Some positive principle is needed to secure the cohesion of those who have withdrawn from the corruption. This can be found only in Christ, who is the true center of unity, and who, through his mediatorial powers can unite the assembly of God as its Redeemer, its Head, its Life.

This assembly must have the power, as well as direction, to gather the believers who forsake the corruption of an apostate church -- the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Believers do not need to wait until that power produces a complex and organized union of all believers, for "two or three gathered in my name" may act in reliance upon the promise of blessing given by God. The assembly is to be a single gathering of all believers, without pretense of pomp or ritual, with strict adherence to the scriptures for all procedure, and with reliance upon the Holy Spirit as the source of its power.

The responsibility for this assembly lies with the Brethren.

The presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church as one body was the grand doctrine on which the whole testimony of the Brethren was founded . . . . the testimony was especially committed to the Brethren.<sup>1</sup>

Darby rejects with utter disregard all claims of others to be the true representatives of Christ's body on earth, and makes for the Brethren a sole claim to this distinction. Only the Brethren gather in His name. Others gather as Baptist, Congregationalist, etc., not as 'His body.'<sup>2</sup> Only the Assembly (Brethren) is the church of God on earth.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, A Letter to the Saints in London, As to the Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. III, pp. 5,6.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Lectures on the Church, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, God, Not the Church . . . Teacher . . . Word, p. 361.

I cannot think any, even the most zealous of those persons who, with a desire of which I willingly acknowledge the sincerity, have sought to again set up the fallen dispensation . . . are in a condition to be able to do it, or that they have the right to impose upon my faith, as God's church, the little edifices they have set up . . . . I know that those who esteem these little organized societies to be the church of God, see nothing but mere meetings of men in every other gathering of God's children. There is a very simple answer on this matter. Such brethren have no promise authorizing them to again set up the churches of God when they have fallen, whilst there is positive promise that where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus He is in the midst.<sup>1</sup>

Within the principles briefly summarized above, Darby consigns the entire professing church, in visible form, to the judgement of a dispensation of failure and enumerates the principle of believer-assembly which has characterized the Brethren movement. From such a principle has developed his views on all aspects of ecclesiastical doctrine: nature of church, unity of Christ in the church, ministry, offices, responsibility, order of worship, his involved eschatology, and the place of the Holy Spirit in the church.

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Reflections on the Ruined Conditions of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, pp. 11, 24.

It does not concern Darby that there has been no evidence of this assembly from Pentecost until its truth was given to the Brethren.

"It matters little to us if ecclesiastical historians have failed in their interesting researches to discern a single trace of the true expression of God's assembly from the close of the Apostolic era to the beginning of the present century. It is quite possible that there may have been here and there amid the thick gloom of the Middle Ages, 'two or three' really gathered in the Name of Jesus, or at least those who sighed after the truth of such a thing. But, be this as it may, it leaves that truth wholly untouched. . . . Although it could be proved that for eighteen hundred years there were not even two or three gathered in the name of Jesus, that would not in the smallest degree affect the question. The word is not 'What saith the ecclesiastical historian?' but, 'What saith the Scriptures?' C.H. Mackintosh, The Assembly of God, or, The All-Sufficiency of the Name of Jesus. (London: G. Morrish, n.d.), p. 43.

While this statement does not come directly from Darby, it reflects his attitude as expressed repeatedly in many of his writings.



## THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

Though the visible manifestation of the church be in ruins, Christ's body, as the actual church, cannot be marred; it is what Christ is building for final presentation to himself. While the efforts of man - man's relation to God - may be nullified by a break in these relations, the church must continue its testimony.<sup>2</sup>

It is incorrect, however, to think of the church in the accepted connotation of the word. The church is not an organized ecclesiastical system of denominations, boards, and regulations, but the living organism of Christ's body as the habitation of God on the earth. Use of the word "church" in modern parlance places one in a dilemma as to what meaning is intended.

What does it mean? Mr. G's congregation might build him a new church; then it means a building. Or Mr. S. may be a member of Mr. G's church; then it means an assembly under the presidency of Mr. G. In England, he is going into the church means he is going to become a clergyman; he is going to church, is the public service of worship - gone to church is the building again.<sup>3</sup>

It is more correct to think of the body of Christ as the "assembly" rather than as the "church" since the word ecclesia is more accurately

<sup>1</sup>While the doctrine of the church presented here represents a synthesis of Darby's writings, contradictory statements to some of the ideas here advanced may be found in isolated passages of his work, for many of his tracts, written to meet specific needs, may contain statements contradictory in details, but not in principles. The author has attempted to evaluate all these statements and determine what constitutes the basis of his beliefs on the doctrine. To the extent that he has been successful, this discussion will be a fair and representative presentation of Darby's views.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, What the Church Has Amid the Ruins, p. 426.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Church and Privileges, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 426.

translated assembly. The word has not always been employed with its present meaning, since it has been gradually shaped for this purpose. The word assembly is known in Old Testament language and thought, for two Hebrew words, 'edhah, the actual gathering, and qahal, the corporate unity of the congregation, were both known as assembly, or congregation. The former was with some consistency translated by the Septuagint as synagoge, the latter by ecclesia. It is hardly possible in earlier books to find a distinction between the two as to meaning, but in later Judaism there is some difference. The word synagoge came to be used especially for an actual body of people gathered together in one place, while the word ecclesia is used more particularly of a sacred assembly, especially of the sacred assembly of Israel, and hence an assembly in its ideal aspects.

However, the usage was not fixed, and the ultimate distinction of the words synagoge and ecclesia arose from the fact that the word synagoge became the usual Greek designation for the building known under that name. As the one word was used for the building, the other became employed to express the religious assembly of God's chosen people. It thus acquired the more ideal connotation, and for that reason was adopted by the Christian Church.

It has not always been translated as church, however. At the time of translation of the King James version, the Geneva version, in which the word was translated "congregation," was in popular use. Mindful of the difficulties suffered by his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, the King decreed that the word must be translated "church."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 427.



In his own version of the New Testament, Darby invariably translated ecclesia as assembly. "The assemblies . . . being edified;" (Acts 20:28) "Take heed . . . to shepherd the assemblies;" (Rom. 16:16) and "All assemblies of Christ salute you." (1 Tim. 3:15)

The assembly - used in the sense of the body of Christ - is more than just the gathering of Christians; it is the gathering of believers "in His name." Believers do not gather 'in His name' merely by professing to do so, but only as they conform to the ideal which He has established. Baptists, for example, cannot invoke His blessings, however sincere they may be, by merely meeting as Christians, for, they are still within the ruins of a professing church. God's testimony has moved forward from the Church to the Assembly.

The assembly is the remnant of the professing church just as the church became the remnant of Israel.<sup>1</sup> It is constituted by believers who have gathered in the Lord's name.<sup>2</sup>

. . . supposing ten thousand Christians, meeting simply as Christians, is that enough? I can conceive an assembly of professing, yes, real Christians; yet there would be no reason to call them God's assembly. It is not the fact of being a Christian that constitutes God's assembly, but their being gathered in the name of the Lord. (Italic not in original).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Church . . . House . . . Body, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup>To be gathered in His name means to conform to the provisions which he has established: the principle of the free rule of the Spirit to exercise His gifts in the assembly in the building up of the Body of Christ without external or central authority, the rule of man, or organized societies -- all of which hinder the Spirit. Other Christian groups could so meet, but they are consumed with the extraneous organization of the professing church, hence, cannot meet in His name. It is not that the Brethren have an exclusive possession of such truth -- it is simply that one cannot meet in 'His Name', as here defined, and at the same time meet in a professing church which denies the provisions of 'His Name.'

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Lectures on the Church of God, p. 256.

The original standing of the church consisted in such a gathering 'in His Name.'<sup>1</sup> Although the principle has been perverted by the church, the assembly restores it. The 'two or three' take the place of the temple, which was the locality of God's presence, as a principle of union.<sup>2</sup>

To be gathered in His Name is a privilege of which only the Brethren have availed themselves.<sup>3</sup> It is a state, not an act. It is the body which the Holy Spirit forms into unity, as connected with, and united to the Lord Jesus Christ, its Head, seated at the right hand of God; and that which the Holy Ghost unites to him is the only thing in scripture called the assembly.<sup>4</sup>

It is the assembly which is gathered by God the Holy Ghost round the person of the Son, to worship and hold fellowship with God the Father. It is the actual living unity with Christ, and with each other, of those who, since Christ resurrection are formed into unity by the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup>

It is not the task of the Brethren, however, as believers, to build the assembly from the ruins of the church. Man has no responsibility for building; it is Christ who builds.<sup>6</sup> Nor is it necessary that the assembly be built - for it has always existed concurrently with the professing church. The assembly has always been in God's plan as His church. What is known as the organized church of today has never been ordained of God. It is a

<sup>1</sup> Darby, Two Letters As to Plymouth, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> J.N. Darby, Matthew XVI, Col. Writ., Ecc. III, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Not the "Brethren" as an organized group, but the Brethren as the assembly of God gathered in His Name: open to all believers so gathered.

<sup>4</sup> J.N. Darby, The Church - What Is It? Her Power, Hopes, Calling, Present Position and Occupation, Col. Writ., Evan. Vol. I, p. 567.

<sup>5</sup> Darby, Churches and The Church, p. 482.

<sup>6</sup> Darby, Matthew XVI, p. 158.



perversion of the assembly and must now be subjected to judgement so that the true church, the assembly, can function. Man has only to give up the attempt to humanize the Church, and conform to the principle of the assembly.

### HISTORICAL GENESIS OF THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

The church did not come into existence until Pentecost, at which time Christ, through the Holy Spirit, took a remnant of Israel,<sup>2</sup> to which believing Gentiles were added, and formed his assembly.<sup>3</sup> It began "or was found existing, at the soonest when Christ was glorified in the heavens . . . the church was formed on earth by the Holy Ghost . . . after the glorification of Christ."<sup>4</sup>

The church had no existence during the Old Testament: "there was not that to which the Spirit could testify as existent."<sup>5</sup>

There never was a Jewish church. The church, even in its outward profession, stands by faith -- is never composed of natural branches. The Jews were natural branches. They did not, in their divinely-ordained place as Jews, stand by faith. A Jewish church is an unscriptural fallacy.<sup>6</sup> . . . The church is composed, according to Scripture, only of the saints from Pentecost til the Lord comes to receive it to himself.<sup>7</sup>

The Abrahamic covenant was to Israel alone; it contained local blessings

<sup>1</sup>Having established Darby's distinction between the church and the assembly, the author now follows Darby's example in adopting the popular use of the word church to indicate the true church or assembly. Subsequent use of the word church, unless otherwise distinguished, is synonymous with the expression of the true assembly.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Discipline, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, God . . . the Teacher . . . p. 366.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, What Is the Church, pp. 116-17.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, The Covenants, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>J.N. Darby, Law, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>J.N. Darby, Brethren and Their Reviewers, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 71.

and promises to Israel, but contained no promise of the church,<sup>1</sup> and did not reach beyond the original promises to the families on earth.<sup>2</sup> "The body of the church could not exist before the glorification of Jesus, for this would have been a body without a Head . . . ."<sup>3</sup>

What gave rise to the existence of the so-called Plymouth Brethren is the grand truth, the great fact, of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost to form the body of Christ in one . . .<sup>4</sup>

While the church was not revealed in the Old Testament the assembly was, for Israel was the assembly of God by birth; God dwelt among them as His people. The rejection of Christ, however, presaged judgement, but mercy tempered judgement on the part of God, and He spared a remnant, through which Israel could be spared and the glory of the nation established in them later. Isaiah 8 shows that when the nation was set aside, this remnant came distinctively on the scene.<sup>5</sup>

The assembly formed through this remnant did not constitute a continuation of the covenant with Israel. A definite and abrupt change in relationship was established; there was an instantaneous cessation of derivative arrangement, and the whole relationship assumed a new character. The

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Gospel and the Church According to Scripture, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. VIII, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Covenants, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 13. The reader will note that this is a different tract from the one of the same name, noted in footnote five, page ninety-one, from Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Thoughts on the Church, p. 514.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, The House of God, The Body of Christ, and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, The Character of Office in the Present Dispensation, p. 149.



assembly was set on redemption-grounds, gathered to Christ as His body on earth; founded on the sacrifice and atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection. Collected merely as a "kahal," a gathering, this redemption-ground brought Christ personally into their midst, and by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, constituted them a real "hedah," a corporate body, a true "ohel-moed," a place of meeting, where the Lord was. It thus became the body of Christ(hedah) and a habitation of God (ohel-moed). Christ owned it formally as His assembly on the earth. The title "church" (assembly) became the generic name for the assembly of God among men.<sup>1</sup>

The assembly (church) may be regarded in two aspects: as the body of Christ, and, as the habitation of God.<sup>2</sup>

#### CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

As the body of Christ, the assembly is more than just the "called out" believers; it represents the actual embodiment of Christ in the world.<sup>3</sup> It is Christ living in the believers to bring into being His testimony on the earth; working in the soul of the believer - a real, spiritual work - applicable individually and only to those who, through His grace, have been by the Holy Spirit baptized into Him.<sup>4</sup> "The true body of Christ . . . is composed of those who are united to Christ by the Holy Ghost, who, when the professing church is cut off will have their place with him in heaven . . ."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Darby, The House . . . Body . . . Baptism, p. 27-30.

<sup>2</sup> Darby, What Is the Church, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Darby, Churches and the Church, p. 480.

<sup>4</sup> Darby, The Church . . . the House . . . the Body, p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> Darby, What the Christian Has Amid the Ruins, p. 417.

The expression "the body of Christ" is not merely a metaphor to express certain characteristics of the church, though certain metaphors do exist in the scriptures. The church is the body of Christ in a very literal sense. It is not merely an assembly formed on earth by Christ, to which souls are added, but it is a unity with Christ himself in which those who are added to Him become members of his body. It is a living organism, pulsating with a vibrant expression of its vitality, and extending itself into the organic life of its members. It draws its sustenance from Christ, who necessarily nourishes and cherishes it as his own flesh, as members of his own body.<sup>1</sup>

This union with Christ is precisely that which distinguishes it from all other relations of man with God, and makes it distinctively post-Pentecostal. Though the Old Testament saints possessed life through faith, they could not be identified in union with Christ at the right hand of God, since he had not yet established their redemption. The Old Testament saint possessed life through a faith that looked to the future; their relationship with God was one of covenant and law. On the cross, Christ entered into the judgement, bore the wrath of God, and by his death provided the means whereby believers might be established in a new relationship -- redemption.<sup>2</sup> He was the redemption, and in presenting redeemed believers, he presented them unto himself. Believers were, therefore, identified with him: they became his body.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Two Letters as to Plymouth, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The House . . . the Body . . . the Baptism, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World." Col. Writ., Doct. Vol. IV, p. 545.



This identification constitutes a union, not in name only, but in fact. The believer is wrought into Christ by the Holy Spirit who dwells in him, making the body of the believer His temple. (1 Cor. 6:19) He seals the believer until the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), and baptizes him with other saints into one body -- Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:13; 4:30). "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular . . . . For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one, so also is the Christ." (1 Cor. 12:27, 12)

Christ has "quickened the dead in trespasses and sin," and God has "raised us up together, and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" -- not simply with, but in Jesus. Just as Christ occupies a position of glory in the sight of the Father, the believer occupies the same position in Christ. He thus is not merely identified with Christ, he is the body of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The body of Christ, moreover, is more than just the sum total of believers on earth.<sup>2</sup> It is not merely a relation of believers to God, it is an actual living unity with Christ,<sup>3</sup> not constituted by association but by identification. While it contains all believers, it does not exist merely because there is a body of believers, but is a separate entity into which believers are brought -- a spiritual union accomplished by the Holy Spirit who creates the believer in Christ, hence as a part of his body.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Darby, The Church, the Habitation of God . . ., p. 371.

<sup>2</sup> Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p. 450.

<sup>3</sup> Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World," p. 545.

<sup>4</sup> Darby, The House . . . the Body . . . the Baptism, p. 49.

The expression of the body on the earth is the assembly, and in this sense the assembly is said to be the body of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The assembly and the body must be identified as the same thing, for,

Nowhere does the Scripture speak of the body of Christ in heaven. It must be the assembly constituted among the two or three gathered in His name . . . . The assembly is never spoken of in any other way than as the true, vital, divinely formed thing.<sup>2</sup>

The various members of the body are wrought in the Holy Spirit to perform various functions, and God is said to have set them in the assembly. Thus, the assembly is called the body, and the members are set in the assembly, so that the assembly is said to be the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

As an organized body, the assembly is not the body of Christ, for neither a body of professors nor an external corporation can occupy a relation of identity to Christ. Between Christ and the church as a society there is no vital, organic connection such as exists between the members of a human body and the head, or between the branches of a tree and the tree itself. Only individual believers are in Christ, as the branch is in the vine; it is into individuals, not societies, as such, that the influences of the Spirit are derived from the Head.

There is, in reality, no such thing as Christ dwelling in the church, if the church be viewed as an abstraction, as something distinct from the individuals of which it is composed. If societies may be said to have Christ as their Head, it is not by direct union, but mediately; that is, it is

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Churches and The Church, p. 482.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Church, Which Is His Body, A Letter on ARD's Few Thoughts as to the Position of Saints Gathered in the Name of the Lord, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 321.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The House . . . The Body . . . The Baptism, p. 49.



because the individuals of which they are composed are in union with Him. The societies may be churches of Christ, but it is the individuals who compose them who are members of Christ's body. Only as the assembly is viewed as identical with the actual union of believers to Christ as an entity can it be said to be the body of Christ.

While the assembly may be regarded as the body of Christ, because its individual members are a part of that body, it is not the fact of their simply meeting together that makes the assembly the body: it is that they meet "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Even though the term "body of Christ" is not to be regarded as a metaphor, its functions can be likened to that of a human body with its various members performing individual functions, each contributing to the function of the whole. God has placed various functions within the church, each distinctively different from the other. In the exercise of these functions, unity, diversity and mutual interdependence of each other contribute to the total function of the body, so that the total witness of the assembly is made known.

#### THE CHURCH AS THE HABITATION OF GOD

Just as it is the body of Christ, the assembly is the habitation of God on earth. As with the body, this expression is no mere metaphor: God actually lives in the world through his habitation in the assembly.

This habitation of God constitutes a new relationship between God and man. He did not dwell with Adam or Abraham, but merely "visited them."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to Judge Marshall's Tract on the Tenets of the Plymouth Brethren (so called), Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 527.

As soon as Israel was redeemed out of Egypt, and the tabernacle built, God said, "I will dwell in the midst of Israel, and I will be their God. . . ." (Exodus 29:45).<sup>1</sup> The redemption out of Egypt was specifically for the purpose that God might "dwell with them."<sup>2</sup> After the tabernacle, God dwelt in the temple. When Christ came to earth, He dwelt in Him. Now that believers, through identification with His death and sacrifice, become a part of Christ's body, God dwells with them through the Holy Spirit. Since believers comprise the assembly, God is viewed as dwelling in the assembly. Thus the tabernacle of God (the assembly) is with man on earth.<sup>3</sup>

However, like the body of Christ, the habitation is not something that automatically grows out of a meeting of believers; it is that which God has created to which believers may be added.

His own grace has built a habitation for himself . . . ./This is/ not a place of glory into which we are to come before God, but. . . God will come down and dwell here upon the earth. When Jesus was in the world, God's presence was there . . . . now, it is the same thing with regard to the church, as a "habitation," though not visibly, not in manifested glory.<sup>4</sup>

As a habitation, the church is viewed as formed on earth; Jews and Gentiles alike are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. "Here the divine point was God in the Spirit dwelling in a house. He is himself joined to nobody. It is a mere dwelling-place which is formed, and in which He is found . . . . the principle on which it is formed . . . /is/ Jesus himself being the corner stone."<sup>5</sup> It is " . . . those who are

<sup>1</sup>Darby, What Is the Church, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The House . . . The Body . . . The Baptism, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, The Church, An Habitation . . . Spirit, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, Ephesians, Col. Writ., Ecc. IV, p. 498.



His redeemed ones, brought together by the peace which Christ preaches, who have, through Christ, access by one Spirit, that comes to be the place where God dwells."<sup>1</sup>

As with the body, the basis of God's habitation among men is the redemption wrought by Christ.<sup>2</sup> "The dwelling of God with man is the fruit of redemption."<sup>3</sup> Christ, having wrought this redemption, having ascended to God and seated on His right hand, having quickened us to life, and having gathered us together, makes us, thus gathered,

. . . an habitation of God through the Spirit. It is not God merely acting in certain men; it is God dwelling in the church down here, as gathered through the word of the gospel. The church is the place of God's presence on the earth. He has set us in redemption, and comes and dwells in us. When the church was gathered together in one accord in one place, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost came down and dwelt there, the result of the accomplished work of Jesus . . . .  
 [This/ is the presence of God Himself.<sup>4</sup>

It is upon the ground of God's perfect and entire complacency in the church, thus wrought by the redemption of Christ, that he comes to dwell in it. He does not come to test man's faith and obedience, as He did with Abraham, or with Israel, but comes to delight in a faith completed by Christ.

He says, as it were, 'I have so accomplished this redemption, I am so pleased with you, so satisfied because of Jesus, that I am come to dwell with you, to make my abode with you; you are my habitation.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Church, an Habitation . . . Spirit, p. 372.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The House . . . the Body . . . the Baptism, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Churches and the Church, p. 481.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, The Church, an Habitation . . . Spirit, p. 372.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 375.

As the habitation of God, the church does not dwell with God, but becomes the dwelling place of God.<sup>1</sup>

. . . God has formed a habitation for Himself where He dwells by His Spirit. It is so indeed as to the individual (1 Cor. vi), but now I speak of the assembly, the house of the living God. This is now on earth, the habitation of God by His Spirit. (Italics not in original)<sup>2</sup>

The "habitation" is also viewed in the sense of God's building (1 Cor. 3:9); as an edifice already in existence in which God is now dwelling, and, as a building under construction - a process of being edified.<sup>3</sup> The word used in 1 Corinthians 3:9 is translated in 1 Corinthians 14:3 in the sense of edification, or being built up in a spiritual way. As a completed building, the assembly exists for God's testimony on earth; in the process of edification it looks to the day in which it will be completed as the true tabernacle of God;<sup>4</sup> a spiritual house including all believers.<sup>5</sup> As the completed building, the assembly is viewed as the work of Christ: He builds and no other instrumentality is utilized. However, as the extended body, as a house on earth, it has been entrusted to the responsibility of man who has implicit instructions how to govern the church.

In Ephesians 2:21, the habitation is regarded as the temple of God,<sup>6</sup> "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This holy temple

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Churches and the Church, p. 481.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The Gospel and the Church . . . Scripture, p. 534.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Ephesians, p. 499.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, The Gospel and the Church . . . Scriptures, p. 535.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, The House . . . the Body . . . the Baptism, p. 56.



embraces the whole church from Pentecost to the coming of the Lord. In the expression "temple of the Lord," the thought of God's dwelling in the church is again reiterated.

### CHRIST, THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

A careful analysis of the scriptures relating to the church reveals that it is always subordinate and subservient to Christ; He is the Head of the church. This establishes a relationship in which the vital energy animating the whole church flows directly from, and by virtue of, a real incorporation between Christ and His Church.

Christ is Head not only of the church; He is head of all principality and power (Col. 1:18); of creation and all things that exist (Ep. 1:22). His relation to the church suggests that it is related to the eternal purposes of God in the final subjection of all things to Christ. The church occupies a unique position in God's plan, for, while Christ is head of all things by creation, He is head of the church by redemption.

This unique position places the church in the forefront of Christ's interest. It is His church; bought by His sacrificial death; redeemed by His atoning blood; founded on faith given by and in Him; kept by the power of His word; sustained and energized by His Comforter; established in heavenly places by His glory; and to be presented to the Father through His holiness. It is His Bride; His Virgin; His Body; His Life; His Flock. He is its Guide, its Shepherd, its Way, its Life, its Truth. It exists in Him, for Him, and to Him. In being established by Him, it proceeds from Him, that it may return to Him.

The church, consequently, is to share His glory.<sup>1</sup> While all things will be put under His feet, the church will reign with Him as joint-heirs of all the inheritance of heaven. Thus the church is the ultimate of God's plan for man. All other dispensations were conditional - with the responsibility resting on man - but the church is not conditioned, for the sole responsibility for the maintenance of its existence, and its future, is with Christ, its Head.

#### THE CHURCH ON EARTH

Darby does not admit a practical distinction between the "church universal" and the "local" church, or between an invisible or visible church. While there are occasional references in his works to the "heavenly" position of the church, his strongest emphasis is that, for the present, the church is earthly.<sup>2</sup>

He views the church as the ideal company of the redeemed, existing in its perfection of unity where there can be no strife or division, united to Christ, eternally destined for heavenly glories. However, in practical operation, the church is earthly, not heavenly; visible, not invisible; local, not universal. "The church is in heaven as to title and its privileges, and on earth as to its fact and duties."<sup>3</sup>

. . . whilst it is perfectly clear that, when Christ leaves the Father's side to take the church unto Himself, it will form a glorious body in heaven; yet plainly, whilst sitting at the right hand of God, the only thing He owns as the church is the body down here.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Gospel and Church . . . Scripture, p. 533.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, God, Not the Church . . . Word, p. 361-62.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Thoughts on the Church, p. 513.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, The Church - What Is It?, p. 567.



The church has been formed out of the earth, but not for it; as the body of Christ, it is a heavenly entity, composed of "heavenly people"<sup>1</sup> who are to be associated with Him in His glory -- a system forming no part of this earthly system.<sup>2</sup> As Christ's church, they belong to heaven; their place in the restitution of all things is there. They are formed into a spiritual community; delivered in spirit out of this present world, becoming spiritual in their interest, thoughts, and prospects.<sup>3</sup> "The purposes of God for the assembly have their aim in heaven . . . /while/ the ways of God are accomplished and unfolded on the earth for our instructions, both in the assembly and in individuals."<sup>4</sup>

Yet the church, this heavenly body, exists in title only - it has not yet been formed. It has a "myetic perfection in the mind of God,"<sup>5</sup> but exists as to fact only in its earthly form. What is viewed as the church on earth is the formation of that body, which is to be completed, and heavenly, when Christ shall gather it for Himself. "Until He rises up /sic/ from His seat on high, He is working and ordering and acting always (while hid in God) by the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost is down here. That which he owns as the Church is where the Holy Ghost is, until it is united to Himself in glory."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Reply to . . . Separating Brethren, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Character of Office . . . Dispensation, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the Clergy Who Signed the Petition to the House of Commons for Protection, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Synopsis of the Bible (London: G. Morrish, n.d., Third edition, Revised), Vol. IV, p. 280.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, Notes on the Revelation, Col. Writ., Prophetic Vol. I, p. 263.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, The Church - What Is It?, p. 568.

The body, if any place be spoken of, is always spoken of as on the earth . . . The body is formed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and of course, formed on the earth: and though I doubt not that that which is the body be in heaven, the body and heaven are never connected together, because it is formed by the Holy Spirit come down from heaven. (*Italics not in original*).<sup>1</sup>

As both the body of Christ and the habitation of God, the church is viewed as earthly: it is the place of God on the earth. Christ's declaration of His purposes to build the church --- "on this rock . . . gates of hell," proves the church to have an earthly character instead of merely a mystical union in heaven. In Acts, the Lord "added to the church daily," - an earthly act. When Paul refers to "them within and them that are without" in 1 Corinthians he refers "clearly not within or without a particular assembly . . . /it/ applies to the whole assembly of Christ on earth . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 12 'one body, many members' . . . shows that the local assembly, viewed in association with all Christians everywhere on the earth, particularly represents and acts for all saints with the Lord's authority if gathered in His name, yet it shows that the apostle has in mind THE assembly, not an assembly.<sup>3</sup>

Whenever there is a reference to a gift of ministry, it is always with a localized setting: gifts are given to the church, earthly gifts of activity and energy which can only be exercised in an earthly church.<sup>4</sup>

The church on earth is visible: it is not merely visible churches, but a visible church.<sup>5</sup> The visibility of the body "connects itself with . . . the presence and action of the Holy Ghost on earth. It is not merely

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Church, Which is His Body . . . Lord, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 397.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Ephesians, p. 501.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, On the Presence and Action . . . Church, p. 417.



a saved thing in the counsel of God, but a living thing animated down here by its union with the Head, and the presence of the Holy Ghost in it."<sup>1</sup> It is not viewed as in heaven in its Head, but as on earth in its members - the members are the body.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the earthly existence of the church is the manifestation of the activity of God's love and holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> For this reason it was gathered as a remnant from Israel, and when this testimony has been completed it will be given its heavenly character in the glory of Christ. Until that time the church labors through its gifts 'for the perfecting of the saints . . . unto the building up of the Body of Christ.'<sup>4</sup> The body is not yet complete, nor will it be until the work of the church has been consummated in Christ.

This incompleteness of the Body of Christ is the explanation of the earthly existence of the church. The church is not constituted by the multiple gathering of all believers, but by every individual gathering of believers in His Name. Scripture does not speak of the Church of Galatia, but of the churches of Galatia; conversely, it refers to the church at Ephesus, but never to the churches of Ephesus. The expression "church of God" applies to company of believers gathered in His name in the locality in which they reside. Hence, there can be no universal church, in either the sense of a geographical division, or an expression of all believers in the world. The church, each assembly, is a local, autonomous, independent congregation with individual

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<sup>1</sup>Darby, Two Letters as to Plymouth, p. 291.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 399.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Thoughts on the Church, p. 513.

and independent administrative privileges.<sup>1</sup> It answers only to the rule of the Holy Spirit.

Every church, meeting in Christ's name, within a geographical area constitutes the assembly of God in that area.<sup>2</sup>

Observe that, although the assembly at Corinth was only a part of that body of Christ, the apostle speaks of the whole body; for the assembly there was, according to the principles of its gathering, the body of Christ as assembled at Corinth . . . a local assembly cannot be separated from the whole body of Christians on the earth . . . the Christians of one town were considered as representing the whole assembly, as far as regards that locality; not as independent of the rest, but, on the contrary, as inseparably united to the others, being and acting, with respect to that locality, as members of the body of Christ, and looked upon as such in it, because every Christian formed a part of the body.<sup>3</sup>

There is, therefore, no such thing in scripture as a central authority having jurisdictional control over a group of churches. Each assembly is independently responsible to the Holy Spirit for the exercise of gifts for its own administration. It is not bound to other assemblies in a union of by-laws and creedal formulas, but in a fellowship of unity which is based on a mutual obedience to the Word, coming through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Each assembly, however, is independent in government only, not in existence as the sole body of Christ, for each assembly comprises the body of Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup>Only those who meet in the provisions established for His church by God, meet, in 'His name.' "While fully admitting that all Christians in a locality properly constitute the one assembly, if they will not unite, the responsibility and presence of the Lord are found with those who do, and their acts, if really done as met in His name, have His authority . . ."  
Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 286-87.



I do not admit, because scripture does not admit, independent assemblies. There is the body of Christ, and all Christians are members of it, and the church of God in one place represents the whole and acts in its name.<sup>1</sup>

.....  
There is one flock, and only one, meeting it may be in different localities, and elders belonging to these localities; but all the faithful there at any time were of it, because they were of God's flock.<sup>2</sup>

The individual assembly represents the whole assembly of God. Individual believers in the assembly are members of Christ, therefore the whole body of Christ.

### THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

One of Darby's most consistent emphases is the oneness, the unity, of the assembly, which is in a sense visible, and earthly, not merely an invisible unity of a church in heaven. "The church is not just a visible representation of the heavenly unity, but is the real unity itself."<sup>3</sup> This unity is of the whole body in Christ; of the church as a whole. There is but one church, as there is but one Lord, one faith and one baptism, where all are brought together in Christ's body.<sup>4</sup> The substance and reality of this unity is the divinely appointed plan of God to draw all believers into the one body, and by so doing, to make His church united as one.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer, and subsequently in the assembly, is the uniting factor that constitutes the unity of the

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Ecclesiastical Independency, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 458.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 388.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 395.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Two Letters as to Plymouth, p. 289.

body.<sup>1</sup> He has come down from heaven to separate a peculiar people to Christ from the world, and, through His gifts to the believers, is efficacious to accomplish the building up of the Body of Christ in true unity.<sup>2</sup>

We cannot deny the body and its unity . . . and His operations in it, without denying the divine title of the Holy Ghost.<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .  
The Spirit is . . . the link between the assembly and Christ . . . .  
It is by the Spirit that communion is realized and maintained, it is the primary function of the Spirit . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Believers are baptized by the Spirit into the one body, hence, we are baptized into every other member of that body in a unity that makes the body one.<sup>5</sup>

Only as the church is established in unity can it be the dwelling place of God. All believers, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, are brought together in a oneness through which the assembly becomes both God's dwelling place, and a testimony to the world of His nature.<sup>6</sup> While the providence of God manifests its power in the works of creation and in his government, which directs the destiny of the world, only through the Holy Spirit, and through Christ in the assembly, can His presence be manifested in the world.<sup>7</sup> The presence established in the assembly unites the body corporately: a union which produces the oneness of the body, the mutual dependence of

<sup>1</sup> Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p. 450.

<sup>2</sup> Darby, What Is the Church, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Darby, Two Letters as to Plymouth, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup> Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 279.

<sup>5</sup> Darby, Ephesians, p. 503.

<sup>6</sup> J.N. Darby, Either in Adam or Christ, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. VII, p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 278.



the members, and the relationship of each one to the body as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the act which forms Christians into one body, making them partakers of, and animated individually by, the same Spirit. Thus there are many members but only one body, and a body composed of these members who are mutually dependent on each other.

Two aspects of the unity of the church are urged by Darby: a divine unity produced by Christ, and a human unity produced by man's separation from evil. Three relations of it may be viewed as, a unity in Christ; a unity in the assembly, and, a unity between assemblies.

The basis of true unity, humanly speaking, is the separation from all evil.<sup>2</sup> Evil, in this sense, is viewed in two aspects: ecclesiastical and personal. Ecclesiastical evil grows out of the abandonment of the true principles instituted by God: an entrance of the sectarian spirit of professional clergy, ordinances, and practices of the church. Personal evil grows out of individual sin of the members of the assembly. True unity must, therefore, in every case be a turning away from corruption, and to Christ.

The intrinsic power by which this unity is effectuated is Christ,<sup>3</sup> for He alone is the true center of union.<sup>4</sup> He is the object of divine counsel, the manifestation of God, the only vessel of mediatorial power, entitled to unite the assembly as its Redeemer, its Head, its glory, its life. Since the assembly exists as His body, He necessarily nourishes it with care and

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Separation From Evil, God's Principle of Unity, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 544.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 546.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, The Christ of God, The True Center of Union, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 259.

leadership. It is the depository of the glory of Christ,<sup>1</sup> and is therefore the object of His desires. Establishing it on earth, and building it into His completed body, He keeps it in the unity of His own holiness: He is the one Lord over the church as it is one body to Him.

This is not a unity produced by a judicial power, but a personal one. God is not yet separating the tares from the wheat, but He has established Christ in the midst of the church for cohesiveness through his personal holiness. Christ, therefore, becomes not only a center of unity of the universe by creation, but He becomes a peculiar and special center of divine affection in the assembly, by which men are drawn to him as the sole divine center of unity. This is no mere moral force working within the assembly, but a personal manifestation of the holiness of God by which His people are kept in Himself.

Just as the object around which the church coheres in unity is Christ, the character of the unity is heavenly, spiritual, other-worldly. Yet the assembly is not to be taken out of the world, but kept from evil and sanctified through the truth. Since he is the agent of this unity, the Holy Spirit becomes the practical center of the power of the unity established in the person of Christ.

Its nature flows from God's; for of true unity He must be the centre, and He is holy; and He brings us into it by separating us from evil. Its object is Christ; He is the sole centre of the church's unity, objectively as its Head. Its power is the presence of the Holy Spirit down here, sent as the spirit of truth withal from the Father by Jesus. Its measure is walking in the light, as God is in the light; fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus, and we may add, through the testimony of the written word - the apostolic and prophetic word especially.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Darby, On the Presence and Action . . . Church, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Separation from Evil . . . Union, p. 555.



While the unity of the one body is of a spiritual nature, there is a practical unity of the assembly which places man under direct responsibility. Separation from evil, as an assembly, produces this unity.

Failure to separate from evil will not deny the unity of the body as established in Christ since "the body united to the Head cannot fail . . . it implies unity on earth amongst those who are there . . . the body itself cannot and never will fail."<sup>1</sup> However, the manifestation of that unity as a witness of Christ will inevitably be disrupted by participation in evil.<sup>2</sup> If the assembly does not maintain the communion of unity, it loses its strength as the responsible witness of God on earth. Christ cannot fail in His faithfulness to His body, but if the testimony committed to the assembly is disrupted it "is no longer rendered as to make it felt that God is present on the earth."<sup>3</sup>

Denial to the Spirit of God the privilege of exercising control over it, to maintain it after God's plan, and to exercise it through His gifts, causes the church to deny the unity of the Body.<sup>4</sup> Appointment of men to preside as sole teachers, to organize societies, to impose creeds, to enforce external authority, usurps the position of the Holy Spirit, and denies Him his rightful place in the assembly.

Ecclesiastical authority, as such, as established by means of ordinances, is always the enemy of truth. When . . . ministers lean upon authority, they are accredited as of God, but they do not allow God Himself to work outside those ordinances which give them their importance.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Ephesians, p. 497.      <sup>2</sup>Darby, Reply . . . Brethren, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Synopsis, Vol. IV, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Thoughts on the Church, p. 513.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, Notes on the Epistle to the Galatians (London: G. Morrish, 1881), p. 8.

The failure to maintain the unity of the Spirit, and consequently the unity of the body, has caused the church, as it meets in denominational form, to be in ruins.

The responsibility of the believer in such a case is clear.

Whenever the body declines putting away of evil, it becomes in its unity a denier of God's character of holiness, and the separation from evil is the path of the saint, and the unity he has left is the very greatest evil that can exist where the name of Christ is named.<sup>1</sup>

The truth of Christ's gospel, or of godliness of walk, should never be sacrificed to outward unity.<sup>2</sup>

Unity among assemblies must be maintained through a mutual dependency upon the presidency of the Holy Spirit, and an allegiance to the Word. There is no such thing in scripture as independent assemblies.<sup>3</sup>

The body of Christ on earth is composed of individuals and not churches. Now . . . there is unity only of the whole; there is none in the local assembly if it be detached from the whole. If it be regarded as an independent church, it has nothing to do with the body, it is not in principle an assembly of God.<sup>4</sup>

This unity, however, is not a common communion among churches of all denominations; not a union of differences or similarities between denominations brought together to produce an artificial unity: a unity of structure and constitution.<sup>5</sup> It is not a formal union of the outward professing bodies in an attempt to be cooperative, but a "true unity of the Spirit and it must be wrought by the operation of the Spirit."<sup>6</sup> The essence

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Separation from Evil . . . Unity, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The True Centre of Union, Col. Writ., Doc. IV, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On Ecclesiastical Independency, p. 458.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p. 450.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, The Nature and Unity of the Church, p. 37.

<sup>6</sup>J.N. Darby, Scriptural Unity and Union, Col. Writ., Doc. VIII, p. 489.



and substance of its unity . . . which will appear in glory at His coming, is conformity to His death, by which that glory was wrought."<sup>1</sup>

Outward union of Christian bodies produces confederacy, not unity, thus denying the nature of the church. Unity cannot be legislated or artificially formed; it must be the work of the Spirit, and can only be in the things of the Spirit, and therefore can only be perfected in spiritual persons.<sup>2</sup> Man should not have to produce unity; yea, he cannot, for it is a state, not an act. Lack of unity is evident only because of the worldly interest introduced into the church by man in his attempt to seal authority and position.

While man cannot produce unity in the church, he can place himself in the position where the unity of the Spirit is not hindered: he can rely on the promise that where two or three are gathered in His name, the unity of the Spirit will be present.<sup>3</sup>

The same responsibility exists between assemblies as with individuals. The instruction "ye are the body of Christ and members one of another," given to the Corinthian church, means that one assembly must receive a brother from another as being in the body of Christ.

Conversely, if one assembly judges an individual in discipline, for another assembly to receive him would be either to deny that the first assembly is a member of the body of Christ, or to deny the work of the Holy Spirit at that place. "Am I to then recognize, /sic/ as representing the unity of the body, and acting by the Spirit with the Lord's authority,

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Nature and Unity of the Church, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On the Formation of Churches, p. 233.

an assembly which sanctions sin and says that it is not defiled by it."<sup>1</sup> Assemblies must maintain the same vigilance to keep the unity of the body as individuals need to do.

The outward symbol of the unity of the assembly is the Lord's Table, for this is the act in which the dignity of the body of Christ is seen.<sup>2</sup> ". . . it is the seal and symbol of the participation of all Christian privileges. We are identified with every person who partakes these, not only as to his being a child of God known to God, but as to his being one as known to us with all due spiritual investigation."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Gospel and the Church . . ., p. 533.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Nature and Unity of the Church, p. 38.

The picture Darby paints of the relation of the individual believer to the Christ who makes the church is a recurring tendency in Protestant theology today, due to the emphasis placed on individual salvation.

The church is not constituted by the gathering of believers, but they are added to the church - made to be a part of Christ's body. The question of the nature of the church is raised - Is there an entity already in existence called the church, into which the individual comes? This seems presupposed by Darby's insistence that it is Christ who makes the church what it is. Christ is there before the individual is redeemed, so that he enters into Christ, and hence, into Christ's body. Darby does not view the body of Christ as inoperative, but as being an entity into which the believer is brought, and in which he may have a relationship with Christ: the relationship itself does not constitute the body. The body is not formed by believers, but believers are made to be in the body, and to be a part of the body. The church, therefore, could exist without the presence of a single believer, for Christ alone is the source and substance of His body, though it is naturally expressed in the earth in a visible form.

Darby is pointedly at odds with most Protestant writers on the nature of the church. Few will agree with the idea that the church exists apart from the company of believers, maintaining that it is precisely the relation between Christ and the believers that constitutes the church. A suggestion of this is found in John Oman, who, evaluating the apostolic



church, comments, "The church is . . . a unity of spirit through the one Spirit of God working in the individual members." /John Oman, The Church and The Divine Order (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), p. 59./

He stands almost alone in asserting that the church is visible as to fact, and heavenly only as to title. While not agreeing with the basic premise of Darby, and approaching the subject from a different standpoint, Bishop Gore refers to "the visible, actual church of which he (Paul) is speaking, the church to which Christ gave visible officers . . ." /Charles Gore, The Ministry and the Christian Church (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1893), p. 48./, as does Headlam: "It was a definite, concrete, visible body." /A. O. Headlam, The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion (London: John Murray, 2nd. edition, 1921), p. 198/. Hodge, on the other hand, asserts that it is not a visible body at all. "The church, as such is not a visible society . . . It is not a corporation which ceases to exist if the external bond of communion be dissolved." /Charles Hodge, The Church and Its Polity (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), p. 5./ Heppe expresses the consensus of Protestant opinion, however, when he quotes Braun (II, iv, 24, 22, 7) as, "One and the same church may be called visible and invisible, but for a different reason. It is called visible, not only because men as men are visible, but because outwardly they profess Gospel truth and celebrate the sacraments according to the lawful use for which they were instituted by God. It ought to be called invisible because of the Spirit and true faith, which resides in the mind alone, which no man can see, which God alone knows." /Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics (London: George Allen and Unwin. Trs. by G.T. Thompson, 1950), p. 668./ Bey-schlag warns, however, as Darby most certainly would, that not all who "belong to the visible church are to be reckoned to the invisible, because they lack a living faith." /Willibald Beyschlag, New Testament Theology (Edinburgh: T & T Clark. Trs. by Neil Buchanan, 2nd. edition, 1908), Vol. II, p. 231./

While Darby treats the expression "body of Christ" as an actual entity that exists in Christ, most writers treat it as a "figure of speech" expressing a "metaphor," as T.G. Jallard terms it /The Origin and Evolution of the Christian Church (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1948), p. 59./ E. Tyrell Green /The Church of Christ, Her Mission, Sacraments, and Discipline (London: Methuen & Co., 1902), p. 6./, calls it a "mystical union." Charles Hodge /Ibid., p. 15./ calls it a "relation;" while it is described as an "image" by F.A.J. Hort, /The Christian Ecclesia (London: Mcmillan & Co. Ltd., 1900), p. 16./

He will find few writers, outside of his own group of followers, who will admit the absolute distinction which he maintains between Israel and the Church when he attempts to divorce the two as diametrically opposed to each other. Hort expresses this as, "The Ecclesia of the ancient Israel was the Ecclesia of God; and now, having been confessed to be God's Messiah . . . He could to such hearers . . . claim that Ecclesia as His own. What He declared that He would build was in one sense old, in another new. It had a true continuity with the Ecclesia of the Old Covenant; the building of it would be a rebuilding. Christ's work in relation to it would be

a completion of it, a bestowal on it of power to fulfill its yet unfilled Divine purposes. . . . Hence we go greatly astray if we interpret our Lord's use of the term Ecclesia in this cardinal passage (Matt. 16:18) exclusively by reference to the Ecclesia known to us in Christian history." Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

He would find much agreement among able scholars, even those with strong ecclesiastical bias, for his position on the independency of each local congregation, not only to govern itself, but to be the representative of the whole body of Christ in its locality. Oman reflects this thought when he states, ". . . the local communities assert that the essence of the whole was in every part, that wheresoever two or three were gathered together the Church was in all its power and all the promise of the kingdom of God." /Op. cit., p. 11./ He quotes Rudolf Sohm, "The faith of the Christian sees in every assembly gathered in the Spirit the whole of Christianity, the people of God, the total community. On that ground every assembly of Christians, whether small or great, which met in the name of the Lord, was called ecclesia, an assembly of the New Testament." /Loc. cit./ Hatch, writing on the independency of government, comments, "For although, it is indisputable that our Lord founded a Church, it is an unproved assumption that that Church is an aggregation of visible and organized societies." (pref. xii): "the theory upon which the public worship of the primitive Churches proceeded was that each community was complete in itself, and that in every act of public worship every element of the community was present." / Edwin Hatch, The Organization of the Early Christian Churches, (Oxford: The University Press, 4th. edition, 1892), p. 79./

He stands alone, other than among his immediate followers, on his assertion that the church is in ruin. Almost every scholar of repute would not only deny the charge, but vigorously contend that the church militant, though at times showing evidence of the influence of worldliness, proceeds in the plan of God, earnestly awaiting the completion of His purposes in her.



## CHAPTER IV

### GOVERNMENT AND OFFICE IN THE CHURCH

Paramount in Darby's concept of the church is his distinction between "government" and "gift" - a focal point for all distinctions relating to the New Testament church. To every aspect of ecclesiastical arrangement -- ministry, office or discipline -- he applies the question, "Is it government or gift?"

The word "government," as he uses it in its true literary sense, applies to the ruling element within the church, such as the duties of an elder, or the exercise of discipline. Applied in the practical sense, however, it refers to any attempt by man to exercise authority over the assembly. In most of his tracts when he refers to government he has in mind the system of ecclesiastical organization of bishops, prelates, orders, regulations, etc., that exists in the church in its denominational form.

The word "gift" refers to the aid of the Holy Spirit in energizing and sustaining the assembly -- the work of the Spirit in the care and order of the church. These gifts have been placed in the body of Christ for its mutual edification;<sup>1</sup> given to individuals to be exercised for the profit of the entire body.<sup>2</sup> The gift is the sole determinant as to the privilege of ministering - it is the divinely appointed means by which power is given to those whose task it is to instruct and edify the assembly.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Review of a Sermon Preached by the Rev. G.M. Innes, in the Quebec Cathedral on Sunday, April 5, 1868, and Published in the "Quebec Mercury" on April 9., Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 396.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, A Glance at Various Ecclesiastical Principles, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. II, p. 5.

While Darby admits that government may have a place in the divine plan for the church, its place is definitely inferior to that of the Holy Spirit as he applies the gifts to the ministry of the assembly.

Amongst other things government may have its place, but it is well to remember that . . . government regards evil, and therefore is outside the positive blessing, and has the lowest object of the church. Moreover, though there be a gift of government, in general, government is of a different order from gift. Gift serves ministry, hardly government. They may be united as in apostolic energy; elders were rather the government, but they were not the gifts.<sup>1</sup>

He has an inherent distrust of any governmental form inasmuch as he feels that complexity of government not only confuses the scriptural plan for order in the church, but constitutes an outright denial to the Holy Spirit of His place as the immediate agent of presiding over the church. "It is specifically the order of the governmental part which I believe has failed, and we are to get on without that, at least in a formal way."<sup>2</sup>

Government projects the human element of ambition and desire upon God's plan for spiritual development. It distorts man's place in the assembly by suppressing the free flow of the Holy Spirit as the guide to full and free worship of God. It injects selfish cravings for authority into the sphere where only humility and obedience should be; it distorts the natural process of spiritual maturity by diverting attention from the exercise of spiritual activities to a conglomeration of regulations and orders; it perverts the simplicity of God's plan of "every believer a priest" by enacting an involved and complex system of ecclesiastical hierarchy; and, it enforces the authority of man in discipline upon the assembly instead of allowing

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Two Letters As to Plymouth, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol.IV, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.



the authority of the Holy Spirit to work from within. It substitutes man for God.<sup>1</sup>

Government itself is not inherently evil; it is merely that man has distorted it so that, as it is known in the church today, it has become one of the major factors in hastening the ruin of the church. If the government of the assembly is conducted under the presidency of the Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup> -- according to the proper place it is given in the New Testament-- it adjusts to its logical place in the assembly-life and does not interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Ministry - Office.--- Government is exercised primarily through the offices of the church, as elders and deacons. Government through these offices must not, however, be confused with ministry through gifts, as seen in pastors, teachers, and evangelists. The confusion of the two by the "ruined" church has led to the unscriptural position of one-man ministry, exclusive pastoral supervision, absolute authority of the hierarchy, and, because of such, the denial of the priesthood of all believers. It has grievously hindered the work of the Holy Spirit in the assembly by placing men who have been elected to an office in a position in which there should only be men with a divine gift to minister.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Notions of a Clergyman Dispensationally the Sin Against the Holy Spirit, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>A term used to indicate the supremacy of the Holy Spirit in guiding the assembly - to be discussed fully under that heading later in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Christian Liberty of Preaching and Teaching the Lord Jesus Christ, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 104.

The basis of ministry is a gift from God to edify all believers, while the basis of office is the moral authority of man to watch over the local assembly. In the exercise of the gift for ministry, man is the servant of Christ to His body, empowered by the energy of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Office, on the other hand, is a divinely appointed position within the local assembly for the care of the mundane affairs of the assembly.<sup>2</sup>

If a man has the gift of ministry he is under obligation, and has the privilege, of exercising it everywhere since the gift is given for and to the body of Christ.

. . . gifts, as gifts, are the various members of the body (Eph. iv, 1 Cor. xiv, Rom. xii) who ought to render their services according to the will of God, wheresoever they find themselves. The scripture never says that an evangelist is the evangelist of an assembly or of a flock. . . . God has put such gifts in the Church, in the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Office, however, is restricted to the one determinate place to which it has been established.

The possessors of an office are not, as such, members of the body of Christ; though those who are installed therein are themselves individually such.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .  
The bishop /elder/ was attached to a particular church, which was not necessarily the case of the pastor, because the latter, according to the word, was placed as a joint of supply in the body. . . .<sup>5</sup>  
The bishops . . . were local charges; they only acted within the precincts of the particular church where they were formed. The bishop

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Brief Remarks on the Spirit and the Assembly, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 546.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 389.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, On Gifts and Offices in the Church, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 410.



was not a gift . . . but a local charge. The pastor is a gift in the body; the bishop a charge in a particular church.<sup>1</sup>

This gift-office distinction must always be rigidly maintained, asserts Darby, for it is the only scriptural pattern by which the assembly may be assured of the continued blessings of the Lord in its church life.

#### MINISTRY WITHIN THE ASSEMBLY

A divinely appointed ministry in the New Testament is not only to be admitted, but insisted on, for God has given a ministry to His church for its edification and for evangelizing the world.<sup>2</sup> "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . ." (Ephesians 4:11,12)

We cannot conceive a more full or glorious expression of ministry than this; complete in every possible respect - in its source, in the sphere it belongs to, in the completeness of its objects, and in the enduringness of its character. . . . It is a proper ministerial service.<sup>3</sup>

Though apostles and prophets are listed as gifts in the church, they do not exist today, for they were given as "foundation gifts" upon which the church was to be based, and, once it was founded, they passed from existence. Pastors, teachers, and evangelists were placed in the church for its edification, "unto the perfecting of the saints," and exist for that purpose today.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 357-58.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 401.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Col. Writ., Expository Vol. I, p. 50.

Nature of Ministry.-- Ministry is above any authority of man to license or prevent, for it comes directly as the gift of God, specially determined to meet every need within the assembly.<sup>1</sup> The Spirit empowers the members of the body with spiritual gifts to enable them to perform the various services within the body. In bestowing these gifts, He determines their place of service providentially, or directly through the Spirit, by either raising them within a particular assembly, or, guiding them to the assembly in need. The gift of evangelist, pastor, or teacher is directed by the Holy Spirit to that assembly which needs the particular gift -- nothing is left to human choice or judgement.

The nature of the dispensation of the assembly (the church age) determines the nature of this ministry. In contrast to the Jewish era, where God had chosen a people who needed a law to direct their conduct, and a priesthood to maintain their relation with him, the church is composed of believers who have had an individual experience of regeneration with God, and therefore do not need an intermediate priestly class to maintain their relation with Him. Where the priesthood of Judaism acted as an external factor, acting in behalf of, but not through, the people, the church has been given a ministry composed of all believers who equally enjoy the right of entering into the immediate presence of God.<sup>2</sup>

This ministry, however, is more than a mere relationship with God, however intimate and personal it may be. It is the activity of God's love

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, On Ministry, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 317-18.



as He gives gifts for the edification of the assembly.

These gifts are, properly, that which is called ministry. . . . Every gift is a ministry. . . . By the possession of a gift I become the servant of Christ, from whom I hold the gift by the Spirit, and whom the Spirit reveals as Lord. Hence, every gift in exercise is a ministry - service discharged under responsibility to Christ. . . . It was a work, and not merely signs of Power.<sup>1</sup>

Priesthood of all believers does not confer the right to preach on every believer; it is the gift which imposes this duty on those who have received it. If a spiritual capacity for preaching is evidenced by an individual, the assembly has neither the right nor the authority to permit or hinder its exercise.

Neither gifts, nor the right to preach, are the portion of all; it is very wrong to consider the right of preaching as the right of man. It is a duty which flows from a gift, an obligation towards God. . . . The church cannot entrust him with that for which God has already made him responsible, nor take it from him; neither can it relieve him from the responsibility which is attached to it. On the other hand, the Church cannot entrust to him that which God has not given him.<sup>2</sup>

The privilege of exercising the gift is inherent within the gift.

" . . . the Lord when he goes away gives talents to His servants, and they are bound to use them without other authority." (Italics not in original.)<sup>3</sup>

In Acts 8:4 "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." Peter declares, "As every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same. . . ." (1 Peter 4:10). In Romans 12:6 Paul instructs, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith."

<sup>1</sup>Darby, A Glance . . . Principles, p. 4,5, fn.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Offices in the Church, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to Judge Marshall's Tract on the Tenets of the Plymouth Brethren (So Called), Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 536.

Having no authority to confer or hinder the right of ministry, the assembly has no right to certify exclusive ministers since the Holy Spirit establishes a diversity of ministry for the varied needs of that assembly.<sup>1</sup> It is neither scriptural nor logical to assume that all the gifts - pastor, teacher or evangelist - will be given to one man, nor that the assembly needs only the gift (or gifts) which its exclusive minister may possess. A church cannot, therefore, "limit the number of its ministers because they are not its ministers but those of Jesus Christ, exercising their service in the body of Christ."<sup>2</sup> All who have received the gift of ministry may freely exercise that gift in any assembly. "The assembly is to recognize those to whom God has given the gift and be submissive to their teaching and ruling."<sup>3</sup>

Recognition of true ministry can be determined only by the evidence of divinely-appointed gifts since God has established this as its only criterion.

The idea of choosing among candidates or among those called to the ministry is . . . foreign to the Word, excluded from the Word. And the idea that a young candidate or an ordained minister should go and make himself heard, that the population of a place may choose him, is certainly not to be found in the Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

An authoritarian ministry within the church existed only during its early days while it was among the Jews. It was an earthly element in her constitution, and was intended to pass away when the Jews had finally

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Derby, Presbyterianism: A Reply to "The Church and the Pulpit." Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 518.

<sup>2</sup>Derby, On the Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit . . ., p. 434.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Derby, What the Christian Has Amid the Ruins of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 443.

<sup>4</sup>Derby, On Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit . . ., p. 395.



rejected the Gospel, and the full spiritual character of the Church developed under the teaching of Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Paul is to be regarded as the type of the dispensation which he represented; as he received his apostolic commission "not of men nor by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father," so in the system introduced by him the "apostolic succession" was to be broken, the ministers of the church were to be chosen by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, "no human choice concurring, no human ordination witnessing this authoritative act of the Divine Spirit."<sup>2</sup> To preserve the system of an appointed ministry, X as the "church in ruins" has done, with its ordained professional clergy, its exclusive ministry, its ecclesiastical hierarchy, is to deny the Spirit the prerogative of exercising the ministry through the gifts of God.

The clergy I reject, because the system denies in principle and fact the title and right of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, the unity of the body, and the gifts by which Christ, its head, edifies the church, and calls sinners; and it has substituted geographical divisions for faith, or sectional membership for membership in Christ -- has substituted human arrangement of one kind or another for a divinely given ministry.<sup>3</sup>

True Christian ministry is not the ministry of the clergy, for clergy means that the title to minister depends, not on gifts and teaching the truth, but on human establishment; in many cases, of unconverted men by unconverted men.<sup>4</sup> Some clergymen may be ministers, in the true sense of having received the gift to minister, but a divinely given ministry sets aside the clerical system, in which Paul and all his early laborers of

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Character of Office in the Present Dispensation, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 409.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 401.

scripture could not have been permitted to exercise their ministry.<sup>1</sup> True ministry, however, encourages the freedom of the believer to edify himself and others through the Holy Spirit, consisting of gifts to strengthen the body of Christ, and, to serve as a sign to the world of the person of the Holy Spirit in the church.<sup>2</sup>

True ministry is a work of Christ through men; a projection of Christ into His body for its enrichment; a bestowal of His riches to it that it may be nourished in divine truth; and, the setting into motion all the functions of His body - that He may be glorified in the church. It is a ministry of the manifestation of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Source of Ministry.-- Behind all thought for ministry within the church lies the truth of the risen Christ, who, having established His church, desires that He continue his work in the world through it. He has dispatched the Holy Spirit to insure this work, to teach the church "all things," and for the "perfecting of the saints." In Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12, the source of this "building up the body of Christ" is declared to be the gifts of ministry. They may be considered as either the gift of Christ, or the operation of the Holy Spirit within the assembly, for Scripture gives both of these aspects.<sup>4</sup>

The gifts of Ephesians 4 - pastor, teacher, evangelist - are ministries for the gathering and edifying of the body of Christ, given by

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Offices in the Church, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>J.N.Darby, Letter to a Christian Friend in Reply to a Presbyterian Minister on the Law, the Sabbath, Ministry and the Sacraments, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 541.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Offices in the Church, p. 5.



Christ for that purpose. Having established the church, Christ's first concern is to communicate to His body the riches of the grace by which it has been formed, and to reveal to it its future glory with Him. It is through the gifts of ministry that this is accomplished. "It is in the assembly that the nature of God, the counsels of grace, and the efficacious work of Christ are concentrated in their object; and these gifts are the means of ministering in the communication of these blessings to men."<sup>1</sup>

The source of true ministry, therefore, is the gift from Christ, divinely provided for the edification of His body.<sup>2</sup>

All gifts proceed immediately from Christ, the Head, and have their existence in believers by the energy of the Holy Spirit . . . Christ is ascended up on high, and has received gifts for men who . . . become instruments of the Christ who is absent, by means of the gifts which are communicated to them . . . evangelists, pastor, and teachers, and so long as Christ loves the church, and is alone the source of grace . . . these same gifts will remain for the edification of the church.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of a derivative authority as the source of the ministry is contrary to all scripture.<sup>4</sup> It is a positive lapse from God's order of ministry - a definite pattern through which corruption has entered the church.

To instruct young men at a university with a view to ordaining them afterwards, be they or be they not gifted or converted, is not to commit certain truths to faithful men; it is to instruct and train for a profession young men whose faithfulness has not yet been able to be proved, and who have not one of these qualities requisite for an elder.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 483.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Character of Office in the Present Dispensation, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, A Glance . . . Various Principles, p. 33.

It is perfectly certain that the service which believers render by gifts is completely independent of the possession of office.<sup>1</sup> Their source is Christ, and Christ alone. He, not the church, or any section of the church, is the reservoir of the gifts. No man, nor body of men, can impart either the gift, or the privilege of gifts, for this is unreservedly the prerogative of Christ.

The practice of assigning the right to preach to certain men, as if the source of the ministry was inherent within the powers of man, has almost eclipsed the freedom to exercise the gift in the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This has brought the church to the place where,

When it is conceded that God has furnished the gifts to a man, he cannot exercise it unless he has been "called" as pastor. This confusion arises from the mistaking of gift and office, and has resulted in the "clergy" where one man is set aside as ordained by man, and no one else may exercise his gift except this one man.<sup>2</sup>

This is entirely contrary to God's plan, for true ministry is given only by Christ. In Ephesians 4, Christ gave to the church, and there is no sign of appointing or ordaining to an exclusive ministry. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Spirit gives to every man to profit withal. God has set these gifts in the church where they receive their source from Christ.<sup>3</sup> Every gift manifests itself to the church as it "ascertains itself in its exercise."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Brief Remarks on the Spirit and the Assembly, p. 549.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, pp. 391-92.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Power in the Church: or, Not Imitation, but Obedience in the Sense of the Present Ruin, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 459.



Two principles motivate these gifts to men: the active energy of Christ's love for His church - His desire to reveal spiritual truth to it - and, the sovereignty of God, who gives both the natural capacity to contain the gift, and the gift itself.<sup>1</sup> This means that the gifts themselves are a warrant or authorization fully sufficient to permit the one who possesses them to exercise them, if the love of Christ has constrained him.<sup>2</sup>

Power of the Ministry.--- While the source of the ministry is Christ providing His body with the means for its edification, the power of the ministry is the Holy Spirit, who is the fountain of all spiritual energy within the church. Christ gives the gifts, but it is the Spirit who applies the power of the gift to the individual.

In both his life and his death, Christ was filled with the Spirit, having been baptized with the Spirit at Jordan.

By virtue of His death and resurrection, He places His disciples in the same relation with God, in which He himself stood. . . He baptized them with the Holy Ghost, as the witness of His glory in heavenly places, and the power which identified His disciples with Himself in this glory. It is very certain, from the words of Jesus Himself (Acts i) that the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and that nothing which the apostles had previously received was the fulfillment of the promise . . .<sup>3</sup>

The mission of the Spirit - the baptism of believers - enabled Him to endue all believers with His power,<sup>4</sup> and to enact within the church Christ's plan for the continuance of His work. Man becomes an instrument in the hands

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Ministry, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On Ministry, p. 328.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Christianity, Not Christendom, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 393.

of the Holy Spirit who guides, rules, and acts within the church to convey the message of Christ to the world of sinful men, and to edify the saints.<sup>1</sup>

It is the Spirit who supplies the energy by which the gifts are put into practical operation. In Ephesians 4 the gifts are to the "one body, and one Spirit." In 1 Corinthians 12, it is the Spirit who "divides to every man severally as He wills," and it is the "manifestation of the Spirit" which is "given to every man to profit withal." It is the Spirit who maintains the ministry in 2 Corinthians 3. In Acts 13, it is the Spirit who separates Barnabas and Saul for a special ministry, as throughout Acts He is repeatedly recorded as guiding the ministry.

The Spirit acts in sovereignty in energizing the gifts of Christ, for the exercise of the gift is dependent upon Him. Without His power, no gift would be to profit, for man would be acting in his own power. This sovereignty excludes the choice of man so that true ministry is "neither of man, nor by the medium of man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father."<sup>2</sup> The church cannot be the source of ministry - by ordaining ministers - for the church has grown out of the ministry: it was created, called and formed by ministry, the existence of which comes directly from Christ, and is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Not only is the gift energized by the Spirit, but the right of distributing the gift "to every man severally as He wills" is His. He guides, directs, and orders the use of these manifestations of His power in man, and maintains the body in unity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Operation of the Spirit of God, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol.I, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On Ministry, p. 335.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Operation of the Spirit of God, pp. 194-95.



Responsibility of the Ministry.--- Since ministry comes through gifts from Christ, every believer who possesses the gift of ministry is under responsibility to exercise it in the assembly. The exercise of this gift is not dependent on the will of the assembly, but on Christ who gives it.

He has given, He has placed in the body such or such a joint: they are responsible to the Head for the fulfillment of their functions. The wisdom of the Head is disputed, if the employment of the gift be gainsayed. This responsibility is to be exercised in love and for edification - not otherwise: but responsibility cannot be set aside; nor may we touch Christ's claim upon the service of His servant.<sup>1</sup>

The gift to minister has not been given to the individual alone, but to the whole body of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it given to the assembly,<sup>3</sup> for it must be exercised as in the body since it is of the body "not by outward union, but by the vital power of the Head through the Holy Ghost."<sup>4</sup> No human arrangement can supersede responsibility to Christ for He alone has the right to direct the exercise of the gift.

While the exercise of the gift theoretically is not in the assembly, but in the body, practically, the exercise to the body occurs within the assembly. Only in this manner can the assembly be said to have a responsibility in ministry.

The possession of a gift to minister places a solemn responsibility on the individual. In Romans 12, he is enjoined to make an assiduous and faithful employment of the gift, while in 1 Peter 4 he is exhorted to speak boldly as an oracle of God. Each believer is to wait upon his ministry, and

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Ministry, pp. 345-46.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Churches and the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 483.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 399.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Two Letters as to Plymouth, p. 289.

to exercise it in simplicity for the edification of the body -- "each according to his capacity, and the opportunities which God in his grace affords him, is obliged to announce the good news."<sup>1</sup> No pretense of importance or show of authority should accompany the exercise, but deep humility as becomes the servant of Christ. "Gifts are for the profit of the body, not for display by the individual."<sup>2</sup> The minister owes a direct responsibility to Christ, by whom the gift has been entrusted to him - a responsibility from which no earthly relationship can disengage him.

Inasmuch as ministry is enabled by the gift through the Spirit, and not by a commission from man or an ecclesiastical body, responsibility for ministry does not depend upon an act of ordination or laying on of hands.<sup>3</sup> True ministry can be exercised without any human vocation being necessary, as is attested by Acts 8:4; 9:21; Philippians 1:15, where it is evident that certain apostles preached without aid of human ordination.<sup>4</sup>

The setting apart to sacred office, that is, an official clergy, depositaries by ordination of the title to minister the word, is unknown to scripture and contradicted by it.<sup>5</sup> The only record in Scripture of anything even approximating ordination is the twelve appointing seven to serve tables (Acts 6), and the subsequent practice of "laying on of hands." This is not, however, an ordination to exclusive ministry, for their appointment was especially to relieve the burden of administration from those who ministered

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Presence and Operation of the Spirit of God in the Body, The Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 517.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Spirit, p. 337.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, Presbyterianism: A Reply . . ., p. 518.



the word. In Acts 8 the whole church was scattered abroad and "went everywhere preaching." It is hardly possible that the entire church was ordained.<sup>1</sup>

In every reference in the New Testament to the "laying on of hands," it is a simple act of recommending to the grace of God for work which has been fulfilled. "As to the exercise of gifts, it is spoken of everywhere without that ceremony. . . . the imposition of hands for the exercise of gift was completely impossible."<sup>2</sup> The gift was given by the laying on of hands, as in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6, but this act was not necessary for authority to use a gift.<sup>3</sup>

Hands were laid on deacons; on the servers of tables. The laying on of hands was the universal sign of commending to God, or conferring blessings; the sick were cured by it; the Holy Ghost was given by it; men were commended to the grace of God by it.<sup>4</sup>

Responsibility to minister, therefore, can never be subject to an act of ordination -- it never was so in the early days of the church. Exclusive ministry is a human element injected into God's plan to insure permanent episcopal superintendency. It is clearly a result of selfish ambition and has no place in the ministry to the body of Christ. True ministry is responsible only to Christ, and can be exercised wherever it is empowered by the Holy Spirit, irrespective of the sanction of man.

#### OFFICE WITHIN THE CHURCH

Office (official capacity), as a legal force, was not known as an established principle in the New Testament church, and should never be present in the true assembly of God. "Scripture says not one single word

<sup>1</sup>Darby, What the Church Has Amid Ruins, p. 438.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Reply to Judge Marshall . . . Brethren, p. 535.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Presbyterianism: A Reply . . ., p. 517.

upon the subject."<sup>1</sup> To elect man to fill a vacant office is a defamation of the presidency of the Holy Spirit over the assembly.

It is true that elders (or bishops) were appointed of God through the apostles, but there is a clear distinction between appointing an individual and establishing an office. It is the logic of the world to conclude that simply because God, through Paul, picked certain men of pious quality to assist in the edification of the saints that He thus established an office which is to continue irrespective of the qualifications of those who are to fill it. "No one has the right to say that the Holy Ghost established bishops. The Holy Ghost established certain persons as bishops."<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that Paul appointed several elders (bishops) in each assembly he founded, and appointed them by the authority of the Holy Ghost, for in Acts 20 he tells the Ephesian elders, "the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers," to shepherd the church of God.<sup>3</sup> This, admittedly, was an official act of appointment, duly carried out before the assembly. It does not, however, constitute the principle of establishing an office to which successors were to be found, nor was permission for the assembly to choose or elect church officers inherent within this act. It does not "sanction the practice of ordination - they were chosen, not ordained; the translation is ecclesiastical but false."<sup>4</sup>

Apostolic authority would be needed today for the assembly to appoint its overseers (church officers) "and this does not exist. . . .

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Spirit, p. 368.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 404.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World." Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 521.



There is no authority competent to choose and establish official elders."<sup>1</sup>

The apostolic order of eldership is lost to the church today.

The apostle declares that, after his decease, evil would come in, but he makes no provision for the continuance of orders and elders. . . . Since the corruption of the church, already begun in the apostle's day, there has been no elders in the official sense of the word.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that Timothy and Titus were officially appointed bishops, and therefore an office of succession was established, is 'notoriously false.' "They were employed as confidential agents by the apostle to complete needed order in the new churches, but permanent bishops they had none."<sup>3</sup> "That they were not permanent episcopal superintendents is clear . . ."<sup>4</sup> Timothy was left to especially watch over sound doctrine and against false teachers, yet there is no establishment of an office here.

He was to communicate to faithful men the things he had learned; but here there is not the remotest hint of appointing to office, and its absence was most significant. He was to instruct, not ordain. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Acts 20 is clear proof that Timothy did not occupy a place of official prominence which placed him above any other elder in authority.<sup>6</sup> When the apostle called the elders together "there is not the smallest hint of any Timothy, or any other bishop. On the contrary, language is used

<sup>1</sup>Darby, What the Church Has Amid Ruins, p. 444.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, A Short Reply to "Landmarks," No. 6, of S.P.C.K. Col. Writ., Dec. Vol. III, p. 521.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, A Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 405.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Character of Office in the Present Dispensation, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, A Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 397.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World." p. 521.

which excludes such an idea.<sup>1</sup>

Neither exclusive office nor exclusive authority is known in the New Testament church \*\*\*

The inspired author, in the formal constitution of the church, had no ideas of any higher authority / than the local elder / established by the apostle.

.....  
That Paul knew no such thing as a prelate in the church, he neither institutes them nor recognizes them. If such were there, he treats them with absolute neglect, takes no notice of them, but charges others with duties which would have been incumbent upon them.

.....  
Only James approximates this, but he cannot be called a prelate in the modern sense of the word. He was merely the leader of the Jewish voice in settling difficulties with the Gentile element in the new church.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 405.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Episcopacy: What Ground Is There in Scripture or History for Accounting it an Institution of God, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, pp. 464, 465, 466.

\*\*\* Finding no evidence in the Scripture for establishing an office of succession, Darby turns to extra-Biblical sources in an attempt to trace reference to it in the post-apostolic writers.

Summarizing the writers who find no reference to an established ecclesiastical office in the sense of a legally constituted hierarchy, he cites Clement as knowing only local elders - ". . . apostles appointed elders, several, in a church . . . but of bishops, so called now, he knows nothing. His statements contradict their existence." Polycarp writes to the Philipians, desiring them to be subject to the presbyters but "wholly ignores any so-called bishops, and speaks of the elders that were with him." Ignatius refers to Polycarp as a bishop, "but this carries with it a local, not diocesan, import. This is the only reference to Polycarp as a bishop, and there would have been others if he was a bishop in the present use of the word." Hermas refers to presbyters who "sought to be first or chief. At the end of the second century their existence as presidents of churches in a city was general." Darby's conclusion: "At all events, we have not a trace of a bishop till the end of the first quarter of the second century, all previous testimony positively contradicting the existence of such."

Turning to the writers who speak of an episcopacy, he finds that Ireneus, in his fight to combat Gnosticism, attempts to trace an established leader all the way back to Christ. His list includes Peter (and Paul), Linus,



While office is not official -- as a legal force -- and the assembly has no authority to elect or appoint official leaders with legal authority, a provision has been made for the orderly conduct of the assembly.

. . . the scriptures provide morally for subjection to those whom God raises up to service; and inasmuch as Christ is infallibly faithful toward His body, and inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is always in the church upon earth, the gifts necessary to edification of the assembly are always there. . . . God has ordained all that the church needs to carry on.<sup>1</sup>

The assembly is to recognize those to whom God has given gifts and charges and submit to their teaching and ruling, as it is admonished in 1 Corinthians 16:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13 and Hebrews 13:17. This is "a moral action compulsory on those who compose the assembly."<sup>2</sup> Where believers are gathered "in His Name," the Holy Spirit will empower both ministry and rule, not by an enforced external authority, but from within the body by men who have been given the necessary spiritual qualifications. Evidence of these qualifications -- spiritual maturity -- to

*Scripture*  
Anencletus, Clement, Ennestus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telephorus, Hyginus, Pius, Anicetus, Soter, and Eleutherus, who was contemporary with himself. Tertullian, however, says Darby, differs from Ireneus by placing Clement immediately after Peter; while Ruffinus accepts Linus and Anencletus, but contends that Clement was appointed while Peter was still alive. On the other hand, Optatus gives the order as Peter, Linus, Clement, and then Anencletus. Since there is a uniform uncertainty about the order, Darby is hesitant to accept the principle that they illustrate an accepted ecclesiastical episcopacy, and, asserts that they may have all ruled together in the church at Rome, interchanging the act of preaching.

"Thus for some ninety years after Christ's death, there is no episcopacy on record; but after that, we hear of it first pressed for the sake of unity by Ignatius, and then on account of false doctrine by Ireneus and Tertullian. The introduction of this system has constituted an abrogation of the scriptural system. It was generally established by the latter part of the second century; but it was not established by God." Ibid., pp. 468-76.

<sup>1</sup> Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, pp. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Darby, What the Christian Has Amid Ruins, p. 443.

teach or rule will be readily manifested in those whom the Holy Spirit has empowered. The assembly has but to accept them as Christ's gifts and charges in building up His body and honor the gifts as intrinsic in this purpose.

Two aspects of leadership exist in Christ's plan for His body: the gift of ministry for its edification, as pastor, teacher and evangelists; and, the sanction of rule for its orderly conduct, as in elder and deacon.

A fundamental distinction exists between the two. Elders are local charges, acting only within the precincts of the particular assembly where they are found, while the pastorship (teacher or evangelist) is a gift of ministry in the body, at liberty to be exercised anywhere within the body.<sup>1</sup> Both elder and minister are "appointed" by God, but the elder is a charge for which the ruling capacity is recognized as a necessary qualification, while the minister is a gift, the evidence of which is made known through the nature of its exercise.<sup>2</sup>

There is a great difference between gift and charge. Gifts flow down from the Head, which is Christ, among the members, so as to assemble, by their means the Church outside the world, and build it up so far as thus gathered together. . . . The duty of the elder is that of oversight of the assembly thus gathered.<sup>3</sup>

Those to whom charges are entrusted are set in each locality and receive a position of moral, but not legal, authority from the assembly, which recognizes the charge given to them. They may, at the same time, possess gifts of ministry, but for the function of their duties, no gift is required.<sup>4</sup> This shows that the ministry of the word, and the eldership

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On the Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, A Glance at Various Principles, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 2.



were distinct. A teacher, minister, in one place was a teacher everywhere, but elders were of a local charge."<sup>1</sup> In Acts 24, Paul and Barnabas chose elders "who ruled in the true scriptural sense; but of teaching there is no evidence."<sup>2</sup>

It is desirable that elders also have the gift of ministry, as was the case in 1 Timothy, but it is not essential.<sup>3</sup> The two must never be confused, however, for if gifts to minister are automatically imputed to every elder, ministry becomes a formal matter, attributed to the position of office rather than to the gift through the Holy Spirit.

#### PRESIDENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE ASSEMBLY

As the Holy Spirit supplies the power by which the gift of ministry is energized, just so, in a larger measure, He is the president,<sup>4</sup> or overseer, of the assembly. He has been placed in the church to guide and instruct it, to insure that its unity is maintained, and to fill it with spiritual energy.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, What the Church Has Amid Ruins, p. 441.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Review of a Sermon . . . Innes, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Reply to Judge Marshall's . . . Brethren, p. 537.

<sup>4</sup>The term "presidency of the Spirit" appears neither in the New Testament nor in the writings of Darby, so far as the author has been able to ascertain. The term finds a definite place in the writings of the second generation of the Brethren, however, and its doctrine occupies a large place in Darby's thought. The author applies it to Darby since its meaning is definitely found in his doctrine of the church, and because of its widespread use in Brethren practice.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, A Letter to the Saints in London As to the Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, Col. Writ., Dec. Vol. I, p. 530.

He is the manifestation of God in the assembly - definite, absolute, personal. Nothing is more marvellous, more important, more distinct, than His presence within the assembly, vitalizing it with His own nature. It is a mistake to conceive of His place in the assembly as being only in the gifts which have been given to men. He is not some vague influence which has been brought to bear upon the natural abilities of man, for as a personal Spirit, He lives within the assembly.

Not only is he the manifestation of God in the assembly, He is the manifestation of the assembly, as the body of Christ, to God, for He is the vital link between the two. "It is by the Spirit that communion is realized and maintained, it is the primary function of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The presidency of the Spirit is not merely a figure of speech, for His presence and supremacy in the assembly is the one distinctive feature of the church-age -- He is the literal overseer of the assembly.<sup>2</sup>

We meet on the principle that God the Holy Spirit (who dwells in the believer individually and the body collectively) alone has the right to speak in the meeting and He has the right to speak by whom He will.

.....  
It is not sobriety, as a Christian, to overlook or deny the present direct guidance, by the Lord through the Spirit, of His disciples, as being something over and above the written word.

.....  
If God is there, is He not to make His presence known? If He do /sic/ it is a manifestation of the Spirit in the individual who acts; it is a gift, and if you please, an impulse. It is God acting, that is the great point. / Italics not in original/.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, p. 536.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The Presence and Operation of the Spirit, pp. 519-20.



In the assembly, the Spirit, as the true vicar of Christ, is the sole president, guide and director, and in its ministry no man may take any part other than that which the Spirit assigns him. Every activity of the assembly, be it ministry or discipline, must be motivated by the energy of the Spirit; He directs every detail of the worship - even to the choice of speaker, subject, hymns, and prayers; He presides over every detail of the church life - He is its president.

The presidency of the Spirit is not merely an influence, nor is the exercise of gifts. The actual, literal presence of the Spirit is known in the assembly by an activation of all its agencies by that Spirit.

If . . . be meant the real presence of the Holy Spirit, leading saints to speak and guiding them in speaking, it is surely the only thing of any value or power. If they are not led by the Holy Ghost, they must be led by something else, which will not be, to say the least, the present acting of the Holy Ghost; and if therefore even very good things may be said in the sense of ministry/it will not be in power; for in every sense power belongs to God.<sup>1</sup>

Nor is the guidance of the Spirit merely the utilization of the intellectual acumen or acquired abilities of the individual: it is the act of implanting the Spirit Himself within the capacity of the individual, so that what is ministered is of the mind of God.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of the Spirit in the assembly, however, is distinct from His presence in the individuals who compose the assembly. His activity in guiding the assembly must not be thought of as merely another manner of expressing his work within the individual, for His presence

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Presence and Operation of the Spirit, p. 514.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 515.

is "not merely . . . sanctifying competent persons, but as acting as a living person in the Church of God, and God present in the Church through the Spirit."<sup>1</sup> The presence of the Spirit in the church takes the same relation to the church as Christ did to the individual -- to guide, comfort, sustain, and direct.

He was the one who, by being down here, was to take the place of Jesus when He went away; and was to take up and carry on the cause of the disciples as Christ had done. . . . the Holy Spirit, come as the Paraclete in the place of Christ, was to be amongst them as Christ was. Christ had acted among, and for, and by them . . . Now they were to have another Paraclete, who was to be among them in His stead, and to act among them and for them, and by them; and lead and guide and correct, and direct, and sustain them, and to be with them forever. This was not merely natural qualities sanctified by grace, and man acting by the Spirit; it was a living divine person acting for them, and by them. . . . Hence we see the importance of distinguishing this living presence and acting of a Comforter from man's using his talents in a sanctified way by grace.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that the Holy Spirit abides in the individual as the seal of salvation and as a Comforter, but he distinctly dwells in the church as a separate act.<sup>3</sup> It is because of this inherent inward position within the church that he is able to guide it in its worship and administration.

His most important work as the president of the assembly is seen in the act of worship, for it is here that He is the energy, the sole living source of all true worship.

Sovereign in action, but acting according to the spiritual capacity of each, He uses this sovereign power to express feelings which are suitable to the assembly, raising it up, however, in the tone and

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, p. 535 fn.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 536-38.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 537.



spirit of worship, and leading it into the sensible enjoyment of the divine presence. It is thus that the Holy Ghost acts in man, but according to the energy and grace of God. When Christians are thus met together as members of Christ's body, each acting in his place through the Spirit, the opportunity is presented for the exercise of the gifts of the members, which are for the edification of the body. . . . An assembly which has worship for its primary object is the occasion, by its very nature, for the exercise of the gifts . . . The Spirit, then, acting in spiritual men in order to express the spiritual affections of the assembly, is the mode in which worship is rendered to God.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Holy Spirit dwells in the assembly, sustaining and guiding it, preserving the unity of the body, it is only natural that He should direct its administration. This direction takes the form of motivating the elders in their moral rule over the assembly, both in administration of its ordinances, and in discipline. In all this administration, however, it is the Spirit who intervenes directly, not intermediately, in the affairs of the assembly as its president.

#### DISCIPLINE WITHIN THE CHURCH

A double aspect of God's work within the assembly is a display of His perfect power and wisdom on earth, and, the responsibility for the realization of it in the hands of man as a means of bringing it about through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> This responsibility rests with the church, which is set in the world to display His character and glory during the present dispensation. "It has the knowledge of its present union with Christ, and knows of the character of its existing relationship with Him, as body and bride."<sup>3</sup> It must, therefore, keep itself in purity before

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Worship, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. II, pp. 164, 166.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Ephesians, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 495.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 497.

God: free from sin, and constant in allegiance to Him. When there is known evil existing, the assembly must judge it, for ". . . if it is not done, the church of God becomes the accrediting of every vileness of sin."<sup>1</sup>

Responsibility of discipline toward evil has two aspects: individual and corporate; both related, and clearly defined in Scripture.

The individual has a responsibility to himself and to the assembly. For his personal relation to sin, here is a known principle - simple, absolute, and universal in application: separate from all evil. He has, moreover, a responsibility to the assembly, as the body of Christ, to depart from corporate iniquity in the assembly, if it remains unjudged.

It is the duty of Christians to dis-associate themselves from an assembly which tolerates known, but unjudged, sin.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the leaving involves, I must cease all iniquity - depart from it . . . . That is the settled thing, a divine exigence which nothing can meet but to act upon it.<sup>3</sup>

In principle, however, the believer should not separate from an assembly "unless it ceases to be the church,"<sup>4</sup> presumably, by denying the principles upon which the assembly is met in His name.

The assembly also has a dual responsibility of discipline: toward an individual within its own jurisdiction, and, toward other assemblies.

It is to judge, in loving kindness and with a view to the edification of the whole body of Christ, any individual who does not himself

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Ecclesiastical Independency, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 463.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Ephesians, p. 506.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 514.



judge his own error. To allow such an one to continue in unbroken fellowship with other believers is to invite open corruption of the assembly. No personal consideration should affect this act of discipline -- sin, in one part of the body, will affect the whole body, and it must be judged.

There are, however, three types of discipline: that of brotherly care, where a wronged person goes to the one who has wronged him; fatherly care, where one believer, seeing another in transgression, goes to warn him of the consequences of his error; and assembly care, where the purity of Christ's body is in question. Only in the last type should discipline be corporate, with a definite act of excommunication. Brotherly care and fatherly care are concerned with restoring the individual while assembly care has, as its primary object, the protection of the purity and unity of the body of Christ, in which there is little thought for the welfare of the individual, for the body must be kept pure at all cost.<sup>1</sup>

Ecclesiastical evil, as contradicting the principles upon which the assembly gathers "in His name," as well as doctrinal evil - especially admitting of unconverted men to the fellowship of the Lord's table - must be judged to maintain this purity.

I cannot own an assembly which admits or acquiesces in sin, which takes this ground that sin does not defile it, to represent the body of Christ, or to be met in Christ's name. It is to make Christ acquiesce in sin. . . . Christ's body is a holy body. . . . But if a body acquiesces in sinners being there, it ceases to have the character of Christ's body altogether, or Christ's body is compatible with known sin; that is, the Holy Ghost and Christ present admits and allows sin. This doctrine . . . is a direct denial of the presence of the Holy Ghost making them one, and of the authority of the present Lord.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Discipline, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 529.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, pp. 388-89.

The judicial authority in discipline for the assembly is obedience to the Word. Where there is error known to be in contradiction to the teaching of the Word, it is the duty of the assembly to judge it.<sup>1</sup> It has the same power to discern the mind of God in judging evil as has the individual. It needs more than judicial authority, however, for it needs a power that will insure that the mind of God is actually discerned. The presence of Christ in the body, through the presidency of the Holy Spirit, is that power -- the real source of authority in discipline.

[It is/. . . not simply that the discipline is the act of a voluntary society which excludes one of its members from its bosom, but that it is the act of an assembly according to God, assembled in the name of Jesus, and acting in His name and by His authority, to maintain the holiness which belongs to that name.<sup>2</sup>

Just as no assembly is independently the body of Christ, but each comprises the whole, so each is bound to honor the acts of discipline of the other. The individual who is denied presence at the Lord's table by one assembly because of unjudged sin, should not be received at another assembly in his unrepentant state.<sup>3</sup> To do so is to deny the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the first assembly.

If each assembly acts independently of another and receives independently of it, then it has rejected that unity - they are independent churches. There is no practical unity of the body. . . . All this is simply a denial of the presence and help of God's Spirit and the faithfulness of Christ to His own people.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Ecclesiastical Independency, p. 463.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 452.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Notes on a Reading of 1 Corinthians, Col. Writ., Expository Vol. IV, p. 419.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, On Ecclesiastical Independency, p. 460.



However, one assembly is not obligated to accept the discipline of another if it feels that that assembly has acted in haste without the guidance of the Spirit.

Just because the unity of the body is true and recognized, and that in a case of discipline the members of that body who gather together elsewhere take an interest in what passes in each place, they are free to make brotherly objections, or to suggest some scriptural motive . . . they are capable of all brotherly concern with regard to it.<sup>1</sup>

If one assembly does not honor the discipline of another, however, it thereby judges the assembly not to be a part of the body of Christ.

"It may be that the discipline of an assembly cannot be owned; but then it is rejected as an assembly, and the presence of Jesus giving authority to its acts is denied -- a very grave thing, but one that may occur."<sup>2</sup>

Scriptural injunction for the exercise of discipline is explicit. Paul's instruction to the Corinthians to "put away from among you that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:13) is binding upon every assembly which finds evil in its midst, as is the command to ". . . withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly . . ." (2 Thessalonians 3:6). The admonition of 1 Thessalonians 5:14 to ". . . warn the unruly (the insubordinate) . . ." was given to the assembly in its official capacity. Believers are instructed to be submissive to the discipline of the assembly at all times. "I beseech ye brethren . . . that ye submit yourselves unto such . . ." (1 Corinthians 16:16). In Hebrews 13:17 they are directed to "Obey them that rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch over your soul . . ."

<sup>1</sup>Darby, What Is the Unity of the Church, p. 452.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit. As an example, Darby cites the excommunication of the assembly at Bethesda.

Discipline should always be exercised in humility and love,<sup>1</sup> for chastisement of a part of the body of Christ is a grievous thing. Much prayer and introspection of soul should accompany each act. Discipline need not be total excommunication -- this should be the last resort -- but should always keep in mind the edification of both the individual and the body of Christ. Every act, be it a warning, admonition, or an excommunication, should be for the good of the body of Christ, for the perservation of its purity, the maintenance of its testimony before the world, and for the glory of God.

No assembly has the legal right to discipline, for every act comes from a morel obligation to act through the Spirit. Discipline should never be hastily enacted, for the assembly should "never be in the place of exercising discipline until the sin of the individual becomes the sin of the church, recognized as such."<sup>2</sup> There is nothing more abhorrent to God than the necessity for a judicial process of discipline within the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The assembly should not, however, shrink from its responsibility to discipline, for only in the act of the assembly in discipline through the Spirit can the body of Christ be kept pure.

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Discipline, p. 518.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 527.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 525.

Darby's basic doctrine of government and office (not some of the detailed applications) is attested, from the standpoint of both history and exegesis, by most scholars on the primitive church, although few of them would press the doctrine to the extremes that he did.

One of the most able and scholarly works on the primitive church, Walter Lowrie's The Church and Its Organization in Primitive and Catholic



Times (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1904), without whose help no student of the primitive church can afford to be, furnishes much corroborative evidence to Darby's claim that the early church knew nothing of episcopacy, either in government or ministry. Commenting on the idea of the organization of the church, he writes, "The Ecclesia, the body of Christ, the bride of the Lord, is a spiritual entity transcending the norms of human societies (p. 141) . . . . The organic constitution of the Ecclesia is the organism of Christ's body; the life of the Ecclesia is the life and active influence of Christ . . . There can be no legal organization and no legal legislative authority in the Ecclesia" (p. 143).

On the assembly-life of the early church, Lowrie comments, "There was no office in the assembly empowered to appoint the speaker, or even to 'recognize' them and call to order . . . there was no presiding officer . . . the assembly itself had no right to repress any member who would exercise his gift . . . It clearly emerges from this whole account (1 Cor. 14) that the freedom of every member to contribute according to his gifts to the edification of the assembly was in theory absolutely unrestricted. (p. 198) . . . . the pastoral office, like all other offices, is constituted by the impartation of a divine charisma (p. 205) . . . . all the formal elements which contributed to define their official character, cannot be interpreted as implying an imputation of legal authority, but only as so many ways of expressing public recognition of the teacher's charisma . . . Office conferred no formal right upon the teacher, and implied no formal subjection on the part of the assembly . . . It appears that the episcopal organization was not among the earliest institution of Christianity." (p. 249)

Theodore Zahn / Introduction to the New Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark. Trs. by M.W. Jacobus and others, 1909), Vol. II, p. 32 / agrees that "neither the offering of prayer nor teaching is official, but every male member is privileged to exercise both functions." Beyechalg adds, ". . . there was as yet no formal organization of the churches . . ." / New Testament Theology (Edinburgh: T & T Clark. Trs. by Neil Buchanan, 1908), Vol. II, p. 247 / F.A.J. Hort reiterates, "Much profitless labour has been spent on trying to force the various terms / for the function of gifts / into meaning so many definite ecclesiastical offices." / The Christian Ecclesia (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 3rd. edition, 1900), pp. 157-58 /.

While Darby would not accept the word "election" as designating the recognition to ministry and office of those who had been given gifts, his basic premise on ordination finds support in Lowrie, who sees in the act of recognizing men with divinely appointed gifts, ". . . two distinct sides to the transaction: on the one hand the witness of God, on the other, the witness of the assembly. God's witness is manifested ordinarily through the medium of prophecy - by the voice of a gifted teacher. To the witness of God is joined the witness of the assembly, which signifies assent to the word of the prophet, a recognition that it is God Himself who speaks through the mouth of man. The election therefore . . . is not an election from men, neither by men, but through God. The election is in its nature a spiritual, and not a legal act: the officer elected is not elected by the assembly as a corporation clothed with any sort of legal authority, but by the Holy Ghost (pp. 255-56) . . . . the laying on of hands presupposed an election

to the teaching function - it assumed that the person receiving this rite was already chosen by God, and that he already possessed God's spirit and the spiritual charisma which furnished him with the faculty for his office. Accordingly, the laying on of hands assumes the charisma and does not cause it. The consequence is, that the imposition of hands upon the one who is elected to the office of teacher can only have the effect of strengthening or confirming the charisma. (p. 261) . . . the laying on of hands is a transaction of a purely spiritual nature. It bestows no formal office or outward authority". (p. 263)

What Darby does not realize, however, is that the charismatic endowment of the church tended by degrees to develop a very definite order and ultimately an official organization; that the rise of this organization did not necessarily result from the forsaking of "first principles;" and, that the traditionally established order, which arose quite early in the church, is not necessarily in antithesis to the exercise of spiritual gifts. Darby himself recognized that an authoritarian ministry existed "while the church was among the Jews," and, that apostolic office was definite, but since the church no longer has apostles, it does not have apostolic authority; hence, it cannot resort to formal office. Rigidly maintaining that the church is in ruins, it is quite natural that he maintains that the church cannot restore the offices that soon developed in the primitive church. (For an evaluation of this aspect of his doctrine, the reader is referred to Chapter VII, p. 190, of this dissertation.)

(It is not the intent of the author either to present a comprehensive survey of contemporary opinions on the subject of the government of the primitive church or to evaluate Darby's doctrine, but to show an awareness of the problem as it exists outside Darby's system. For further study on the problem, the reader is referred to a careful reading of Lowrie, op. cit., whose volume is an interpretation of Rudolf Shom's Kirchenrecht, and is, to the author's knowledge, the most complete and scholarly survey of the life of the primitive church that is available. For the opposite view - that Christ founded an apostolate in the church and intended for there to be a perpetuation of office - Bishop Gore's The Church and the Ministry, Ibid. will serve not only as a representative, but a very thorough presentation.)



## CHAPTER V

### SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

(No attempt is made in this chapter to organize the material in a consistent pattern, with each part related to the other in general theme. The author intends only to present some isolated, and often unrelated, aspects of Darby's thought concerning the principles of church life as inherent within his system.)

#### MEMBERSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH

Membership of a church is a thing unknown to scripture.<sup>1</sup> To speak of a believer as a member of a certain assembly, even if that assembly be met in His name, is to deny the body of Christ, for believers are members only of His body.<sup>2</sup> The idea of membership is a figure of speech in the New Testament, used to show the unity of all believers in the body of Christ and likened to the various "members," or parts, of that body.<sup>3</sup> Believers are members only of Christ.

In the New Testament there is no other membership than that of Christ, except that they Christians are members of each other, as forming the entire body, but never members of a church; the idea is different. The word speaks of the members of a body, like that of a man as a figure, never of the members of an assembly in the modern sense of the word. We are members of Christ, and consequently, of the body of Christ . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is a Sect?, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 552.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Churches and the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 483.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 401.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Synopsis of the Bible (London: G. Morrish, n.d., Third edition, revised), Vol. IV, p. 287.

While membership of an assembly, as a formal thing, is not sanctioned by scripture, a voluntary recognition of the members of the body of Christ should be maintained. Each assembly should certify the evidence of the spirituality of the believers who meet together, not as members of the assembly, but as members of Christ's body gathered together, and all other assemblies should honor it by receiving them to the fellowship of the Lord's Table.

No person can deny that the saints passed from one assembly to another, and if belonging to one, were received in another . . . . We see them going from one, and received in another, and that in virtue of letters commendatory. It was because each assembly was owned as representing the body of Christ in its locality that others were bound to receive those who belonged to it as being members of that body.<sup>1</sup>

#### WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

True worship, as exercised in the assembly by the Spirit, is the "honour and adoration which are rendered to God, by reason of what He is in Himself and what He is for those who render it . . . the grateful and joyful response to the heart of God, when filled with the deep sense of the blessings which have been communicated."<sup>2</sup>

No act is true worship unless it is done "unto the Lord:" all reference to or about God falls short of worship. Neither a sermon, nor a praise service, nor supplication, constitutes worship, for, while presupposing the existence and love of God, they contain no element of the one distinctive characteristic of worship: adoration.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 384.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, On Worship, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. II, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 135.



To make mention of His praise, though not in an address to Himself, is undoubtedly connected with worship, and the heart refers them to Him; but thus doing so has not the form proper to worship, although it may enter into worship in a subordinate way.<sup>1</sup>

The believer enters into worship only as he has direct communion with God. ". . . the redeemed delight to have God Himself in their thoughts. They delight to address themselves to Him, to adore Him personally, to converse with Him, to open the heart to Him, to tell Him that they love Him."<sup>2</sup>

The ability to worship lies in the redemption wrought in man through Christ.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the old covenant with Israel, where worship was mediated through the priesthood, believers may enter directly into the presence of God having been reconciled to Him through Christ.

Entirely cleansed from sin - cleansed according to the efficacy of the work of Christ Himself - we draw nigh to that meeting-place between God and the sinner, where there is no guilt, where His love has free course, there to enjoy all that God can heap upon us of blessing. Being reconciled unto God through the work of Christ that put away sin, and being introduced into His presence in that light, God has brought us into the nearness of a new relationship that we may enjoy that which He is in Himself. . . . Such is the basis of worship, and no one recognizes as he should the glory of the work of Christ, or of the love of his God . . . who does not recognize this place as his. No one can render worship worthy to God on any other ground.<sup>4</sup>

Cleansed from sin, believers come to God through Christ, offering praise and adoration through the new nature thus implanted in them. Believers are "in Christ" and thus, not only their praise, but they themselves, are acceptable to God, and can worship Him.

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Worship, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, The Saint's Praise As Taught By Christ, Col. Writ., Practical Vol. II, p. 465.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, On Worship, pp. 143-44.

Not only has the believer received a new nature which is holy and capable of sentiments suitable to the position in which grace places him before God, but he receives the Holy Spirit who reveals and communicates to him divine insights, and inspires a desire for adoration and worship. The Spirit is the "unction" through whom all thoughts of, and affection to, God originates. He abides in the believer, energizing him, making him conscious of his position before God, confirming his love for Christ, and sealing the unity by which he becomes "one with Christ."

Moreover, the Holy Spirit perfects our relation to Christ in such a way that we become "His body," and are brought into a consciousness of our relation to other believers as His church. It is only here that true worship can begin, for worship is corporate.<sup>1</sup>

The Church, which God has created in Christ - that "one new man" - the redeemed who have been "all baptized into one body," offering worship in the "unity of the Spirit, necessarily offer it as but "one body" and that "with all the saints." They are the "habitation of God through the Spirit;" and, that Spirit uniting them all in the unity of the body of Christ, adoration ascends on high towards God, who formed them to be but "one new man" in Christ. If Israel, as a whole, was represented by the priest who officiated in the tabernacle, the faithful now, who render direct worship to God, do it in the unity in which they are all "one body in Christ." In this worship there is more than brotherhood. There is unity, not of a nation, and not only of a family, but of the members of one body formed as such, and indwelt by one Spirit. This is the endowment, privilege, and position of the Church, which is baptized into "one body in Christ," the Head being ascended up on high, in order that the members of the one body may render worship freely and with joy before God, by that unction which descends from Him.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Derby, On Worship, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-59.



Just as the Holy Spirit is the "unction" within the individual, so He becomes the energy, the sole living source, of all that takes place in worship so far as it is genuine -- the Spirit acts in the body. "Sovereign in action, but acting according to the spiritual capacity of each, He uses this sovereign power in order to express the feelings which are suitable to the assembly before God, to nourish and strengthen them by His grace."<sup>1</sup>

While true worship is grounded in the redemption wrought in man through Christ, as an act it centers in the fellowship between the assembly and Christ around the Lord's Table. ". . . worship, with the Lord's Supper as the great and characteristic center of it, and not preaching, is the great object of Christians assembling themselves together."<sup>2</sup> The Lord's Supper is the center of its exercise, around which the other elements (as hymns, praise, prayers, etc., when in the spirit of adoration) that compose it are grouped.

The nature of the Lord's Table explains its ground for the basis of all true worship by redeemed men, for it is there that the church is reminded of the price of its purchase. It recalls the love of Christ for His body, magnifies the gift of God, quickens the spiritual affections, enlarges the capacity for perception of spiritual truth, and draws the worshipper into an intimate fellowship with the Father as sharing the death of His Son.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Gospel and the Church According to Scripture: Being a Review of "Church Doctrine, Bible Truth," by the Rev. M.S. Sadler, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. VIII, p. 491.

. . . the peace-offering is realized in a manner more precious in the Supper. Through faith, we feed on, are nourished by, that holy victim already offered, the sweet savour of which ascends to God. . . . Already in spirit in heaven, our hearts dwell on that which has given us title to enter there - on that which will be precious above all to our souls when we get there. United in one body, we shew forth the death of Jesus, which is the foundation of our salvation, "until he comes," and we are forever with Him on high, where remembrance will be lost in the immediate presence of Himself. The praises and thanksgivings of the worshipper are necessarily associated with the acceptance of our God, in heaven, of the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As the church gathers around the Lord's Table, it gathers in unity as the one body - in Christ! He is present in spirit in its midst and it is to this presence that the church gives itself in adoration and worship. Christ in the midst of the assembly of His people is a living Christ who comes to them in such a way that their consciousness of His presence is real and they can celebrate His death in remembrance and adoration. "Having Him in our midst in spirit, we celebrate His precious death . . . . This is adoration to God for what He has done, and for what He is . . . . /we/ stand in His perfect favour, and in the consciousness of it by the Holy Ghost owning Christ's work as that through the perfect efficacy of which we are brought there."<sup>2</sup>

This presence is specifically the ground of worship, for in it the worshipper's praise and adoration is reflected in Christ's praise of the Father. He adores the Father as a consequence of His perfect work on the Cross: as His body fellowships with Him in the Lord's Supper it shares in that work and thus adores God through His praise. Seated at the right hand

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<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Worship, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World," Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, pp. 583, 580.



of the Father, His praise is the perfect reflex of adoration; in the midst of the assembly by virtue of His presence at the Table, He reflects their adoration of Himself to the Father, and thus the assembly is enabled to worship the Father in truth and spirit.

. . . /after death/ he entered into the ineffable light and joy of God's countenance . . . . Into this He now brings His brethren. He leads the chorus of praise. Thus our praise must be according to the fullness with which Christ knows and enjoys the blessedness of the fruit of His work. . . . It must answer to the name He declares to us as heard from the horns of the unicorns and risen, that we may join Him in praising His Father and our Father, His God and our God, or it is out of tune with Him who leads so blessedly these praises. We must praise with Him on the ground of that blessedness in which He praises, or it is discord.<sup>1</sup>

Only as the church is thus related to the triune God-head can it engage in true worship. It adores the Father-God, who reveals His love for us in His Son through whom, having given it the spirit of adoption, it is made to be joint-heirs of the glories of heaven. It adores the Saviour-God, who has purged it from its sin, and placed it in His holy presence that it may enjoy all the privileges to which He is entitled, His holiness and righteousness constituting its source of joy. It worships through the Spirit-God, who produces it in a consciousness of its unity as the body of Christ, and guides its thoughts and affections in the act of worship in such a way that its very being is centered in adoration of the Father through the Son.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Holy Spirit guides the worship, the extent to which it is true worship depends upon the state of those who compose the assembly,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Saints Praise as Taught by Christ, pp. 468-69.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, On Worship, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

for it is contrary to His will to enforce a worshipful spirit. All effort to produce an "atmosphere" of worship defeats the true spirit of worship, for it must come spontaneously from the heart as the Spirit quickens the perceptions of the worshipper, and brings Him to an adoration of Christ. The assembly is entirely dependent upon the Spirit in worship, for only He can produce the presence of Christ in the midst of the assembly.

Worship, therefore, reaches its height in the Lord's Table, for His presence is more vividly felt there than elsewhere. It may be theoretically possible to worship without the Table, but this would be abstract and vague; true worship is through the presence of Christ, in the Supper. For this reason, it is highly improbable that an individual can worship alone,<sup>1</sup> for worship must be through the body of Christ, where "two or three are gathered in His name."

Worship in the assembly through the presence of the Lord in His Supper, however, is but an anticipation of worship in heaven, where it will be immediate and personal.

There our worship will be perfect. There, all the Church, in its completeness, will be assembled to render worship in the midst of the general assembly on high. There, without distraction and fear, worship will be its eternal joy in the perfect favour of God. What a privilege, even here below, to close the door for a moment upon

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<sup>1</sup>"I doubt, however, whether, in point of fact, it is possible for an adequate worship to be rendered to God by one alone. An innocent man might bless God for His goodness; but God Himself is now revealed in Christ, and for such worship as should rise to the height of this revelation to be rendered by a solitary being would suppose such a level in the worshipper as would put him almost upon the level with Him whom he adores. God would not be in the proper place to Him for worship; for who alone can glorify God suitably, if himself the sole object of His favor. Here the intervention of Christ is of great importance for the foundation of worship because God is so glorified as that worship can be rendered to Him; and those who adore Him do so by virtue of that which He is for them in the intervention of Christ. The worship is based on the fact that God is fully glorified; and we adore Him in acknowledging Him as thus glorified." Darby, On Worship, p. 134 fn.



all the distractions of the nether world, and by the Spirit to satisfy the desires of the heart in rendering to God the thanksgiving which He is worthy to receive, and which in His grace, He has breathed into our souls!<sup>1</sup>

### THE LORD'S SUPPER

Scripture recognizes a sacramental system (that is, a system of ordinances) by which men are professedly gathered into a system on earth where privileges are to be found. The sacraments "are the earthly administration of revealed principles, an outward system of professed faith, and a visible body on earth."<sup>2</sup> Sacramental communion is the seal and symbol of the participation of all Christian privileges.<sup>3</sup> Both Jewish and Christian scriptures recognize this character, but carefully distinguish between personal privilege and admission to the place where these privileges are. The act of participating in the sacrament does not, it must be remembered, gainsay the personal privileges of the sacrament, and the two must never be confused.

There is a double error in . . . attributing, to the external sacramental rite, the actual vital introduction into the living possession of divine privileges . . . . In 1 Corinthians 10 the apostle insists that men might be partakers of the sacraments and perish after that . . . . A person may have all the external and real privileges belonging to the Christian system and not have life.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Worship, pp. 181-82.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Church, The House, and the Body, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to Two Leading Articles in the Christian Journal Entitled, "Our Separating Brethren," Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, The Church, the House and the Body, p. 141.

While participating in the Lord's Supper does not communicate eternal life to the participant, it does have intrinsic value for the assembly, for it is through the Supper that Christ is "in the midst of the assembly."<sup>1</sup> Though personally in heaven, He is present in spirit in the congregation, and through the Holy Spirit, has intimate fellowship with the believer.<sup>2</sup>

He is not in the elements, for they remain bread and wine -- given to the assembly merely as physical reminders of the price paid for its redemption.<sup>3</sup> However, he is "really present with us in it, by the Spirit, according to the intention of the institution."<sup>4</sup>

It is not an ordinary repast, a simple remembrance . . . but an institution that Christ has given to His own; not that they may find in the elements anything else than the bread and the fruit of the vine, but that their faith may in the sweetest way, by the power of the Holy Spirit, nourish itself by Jesus . . .<sup>5</sup>

The fellowship between Christ and His body is as complete in the Supper as is possible while the church remains on earth, for the church is uniquely drawn to Him in a special relationship in this act.

. . . we recognize - remember with thankfulness - that sacrifice, that rending of the veil, that breaking of the body, that shedding of the blood, through which we can so enter, purged from all sins and reconciled to God. Christ

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World," p. 578.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 587.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Extracts From a Letter on the Lord's Supper, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 427.

<sup>4</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 434.



is in the midst of the two or three gathered in His name, but it is a living Christ in spirit, not His body broken and shed blood. Having Him in our midst in spirit, we celebrate His precious death . . .<sup>1</sup>

It is not merely that Christ is in the midst of the assembly, but, in the same measure the assembly is in the presence of Christ.

The worshippers are in spirit in heavenly places . . . in the heavenly places, I say, by the Holy Ghost. I am in Him, and He is in me. It is being in Him, being united to Him, He is in our midst in grace. (sic)<sup>2</sup>

While the Supper is not a means of grace,<sup>3</sup> it should never be forsaken by the assembly, for it is by this means that the church adores Him in remembrance of His death. When the assembly partakes of the Supper, it recalls the Christ of its redemption, the efficacy of which it is sealed in salvation. "The memorial of His death . . . and the truth it refers to . . . awakens every affection which refers to His love and perfect work."<sup>4</sup> As a result, the attention and affection of the assembly is constantly directed to the atonement.<sup>5</sup>

The frequency with which the Supper should be taken is indicated by the practice of the disciples and the early church. Acts 20:7 sets this as "the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread. . ." Matthew 18:20 gives the promise of His presence when "two or three are gathered together in my name." The warnings of 1 Corinthians 11

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World," p. 583.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 578.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Baptism Not Communication of Life, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 404.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World", p. 580.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. IV, p. 271.

concerning the abuse of the supper shows that the object of their coming together was "to eat the Lord's Supper." The assembly should celebrate the Lord's death through the Supper as a formal act of witness and worship every Lord's Day.

Moreover, since the Supper is the expression of the unity of the Lord's body, it is incumbent upon all believers to participate in it. "Not to partake of it is to excommunicate oneself."<sup>1</sup> Believers should judge themselves to be in the proper spirit when they come to the Table. It is the duty of the assembly to keep known and unjudged sins from the Table,<sup>2</sup> and that of the individual to see that He approaches it fully yielded to the Holy Spirit so that he may properly worship Christ in adoration.<sup>3</sup>

True unity of purpose and spirit must prevail among the assembly as it approaches the adoration of Christ through the Supper. Liberty for the presidency of the Spirit to exercise the entire assembly must be unhindered by any extraneous or unrelated practices. He must be allowed to direct the worship and the worshipper, for He alone can produce the consciousness of Christ's presence in the assembly.

Nowhere in Scripture is the practice of exclusive supervision of the Supper justified. Every believer is competent to "break the bread,"<sup>4</sup> "though in a large congregation godly order of mind may leave it to such

<sup>1</sup>Darby, On Worship, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Discipline and Unity in the Church, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, On Worship, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on the State of the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 359.



as may have justly earned the respect of the body . . . ."<sup>1</sup> "God nowhere . . . declares that it is the privilege of a person consecrated, or set apart, to administer it."<sup>2</sup>

Nor is there an official ceremony for the administration of the Supper.<sup>3</sup> "There is in scripture no consecration of the elements, though they are appropriated with thanksgiving since they represent Christ's body and blood and must be reverently used." There is no prescribed method of administration, though usually the bread precedes the cup.

Never make any regulations; the Holy Spirit will guide you, if you rest on Him, and if you rely upon God who is faithful. Seek to be imbued with the spirit as well as the letter of the word; and act in each case under the direction of God, always trusting His word.<sup>4</sup>

While the Lord's Table is the formal, outward symbol of that which coheres the various members into one body, the celebrating of the Supper by an ecclesiastical body does not mean that it is a part of Christ's assembly. If the communicants are joined together as members of a church, and not distinctively as the members of Christ's body, the act does not constitute the unity of the body. When membership of a church is made a prerequisite to the Supper,

. . . there is a unity formally opposed to the unity of the body of Christ. It is possible that this may be ignorance, or that these Christians have never apprehended what is the unity of the body, and that it is the will of God that this unity be manifested on earth; but, in fact, they form a sect, a denial of the unity of the body of Christ. Several of these who are

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Breaking of Bread, Col. Writ., Critical Vol. I, p. 584.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, On Gifts and Office in the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Remarks on the State of the Church, p. 421.

members of the body of Christ are not members of this corporation; and the supper, although the members partake piously of it, is not the expression of the unity of the body of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

However, when a believer partakes of the Supper as administered in a denominational body, it is to him the expression of unity of the Lord's body. "If I join with other brethren to take the Lord's supper only as a member of the body of Christ, not as a member of a church, whichever it may be . . . I am not the member of a sect; I am a member of nothing else but the body of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the true assembly of God should receive members of a church, though they be part of an ecclesiastical system, if they are truly regenerate, and attested so by one known to the assembly.<sup>3</sup>

He is a godly member of the body, known as such; is he to be shut out? If so, the degree of light is title to communion, and the unity of the body is denied by the assembly which refuses him. The principle of meeting (as members of Christ walking in godliness) is given up, agreement with us is made the rule, and the assembly becomes a sect with its members like any other.<sup>4</sup>

If such a member break bread, however, he is "subject to the discipline of the assembly as if always there, because it is the church of God which is in question, though represented by two or three . . ."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is A Sect?, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 553.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Fellowship and the Right State For It, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 554.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Principles of Gatherings, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 577.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, Fellowship and the Right State For It, p. 555.



## THE LORD'S DAY

The assembly is under no legal obligation to observe the Sabbath, but should voluntarily, out of love for Christ, and in remembrance of His death, keep the Lord's Day. "Scripture contains no word which places the assembly under a moral obligation to the Sabbath. When the question arose between Jew and Gentile Christians as to what was to be maintained as obligatory, the Sabbath was not one of the things insisted upon."<sup>1</sup>

The nature of the church, as contrasted to Israel, determines the relationship which it has to the Lord's Day. The Sabbath typifies the rest of God after the creation, and was given to Israel as a sign of the covenant to show the "rest" which it had in the promises of God. It is retrospective, looking back to the day of rest which God took when he had finished His work of creation. The Lord's Day, on the other hand, typifies the rest which the assembly has in the resurrection of Christ. It is anticipatory of the day when His body will be made complete, and the church will be united to Him to share His glory.

. . . Christ passed the Sabbath in the grave - it was buried, and our hopes of blessing here with Him in the grave. He claimed Lordship over it in title of His person. Sin had spoiled creation; we are a new creation; the old is judged; and Christ is risen into and to be head of a new one, in a new condition of men. Into this spirit we are brought, as hereafter in our true rest in glory. Hence the resurrection of Christ is the day which marks out this to us, not the close of creation - labour, as the seventh was, but the beginning of resurrection and new creation - blessing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Brethren and Their Reviewers, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Letter to a Christian Friend in Reply to a Presbyterian Minister on the Subject of the Law, The Sabbath, Ministry and the Sacraments, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 539.

Through the resurrection the assembly has an assurance of a rest in Him when it is resurrected to receive its glory. It is the pledge of the full rest of God which the church will receive. "This entering into the rest of God is the compendium of the fullest blessing of His people; for He rests in holiness and perfected glory and love, and will rest in it when His people are there . . . and His love is satisfied."<sup>1</sup>

As the seventh day was the symbolical rest for Israel under the law, so is the first day of the week the witness of a better rest for the church. The first day is marked out as a day of blessing, as a promise of the beginning of the rest which the church will enjoy with Christ. It is, therefore, associated with the future joy and happiness of the church,<sup>2</sup> marking the beginning of the hope of the church, and pointing toward the final realization of that hope.

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to Judge Marshall's Tract on the Tenets of the Plymouth Brethren (So Called). Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 517.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Sabbath: or, Is the Law Dead, Or Am I?, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 474.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH: SHARING CHRIST'S GLORY<sup>1</sup>

The eternal purpose of the Godhead has been that its fulness should dwell in, and be manifested through, Christ.<sup>2</sup> He has a threefold title to this glory: as Creator, "for by Him all things were created," (Colossians 1:16); as the Son, "whom He hath appointed heir of all things," (Hebrews 1:2); and, as Man, who, being made "a little lower than the angels," has been crowned "with glory and honor" with "all things in subjection under him," (Hebrews 2:6-9)<sup>3</sup>

Since His propitiatory act of atonement, however, He has added the claim of redemption to this title. In redemption He shared His glory with the church, His body, which has become joint-heirs of all His glory. Scripture relates that God has appointed Christ heir of all things; that in Him "we have obtained an inheritance," (Ephesians 1:11); that the church, as His body, is "heir of God, joint-heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17). This union of the church to Christ gives it the prerogative of sharing all His glory,<sup>4</sup> for in looking at the glory of Christ, the church sees its own glory.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>While the scope of this chapter deals broadly with the principles, not the details, of Darby's eschatology, it by no means attempts an inclusive study of the many aspects of his prophetic system, but treats only that aspect which directly involves the church. The future of Israel, of the Gentile nations, the Antichrist, etc., complex and involved in explanation, will be dealt with only as they are related with that of the church.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Purpose of God, Col. Writ., Prophetic Vol. I, p. 401.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Seven Lectures on the Prophetical Addresses to the Seven Churches, Col. Writ., Prophetic Vol. II, pp. 420-21.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church and Toward Israel, Col. Writ., Prophetic Vol. I, pp. 187-88.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, Substance of a Lecture on Prophecy, Col. Writ., Prophetic Vol. II, p. 169.

The glory which the church is to share with Christ is both earthly and heavenly. Earthly glory is that which it will share with Him when He returns to the earth in the power of His holiness to vindicate His righteousness before a world that rejected Him, while heavenly glory is that which it will share with Him in His exaltation throughout eternity. Earthly glory will be sharing His kingdom on earth when He returns; heavenly glory will be the sharing of His kingdom in heaven when He ascends in His rightful place, and the Church, His body, God's habitation, has been completed. X

#### THE EARTHLY GLORY OF THE CHURCH

A review of the events of the history of God's relation to man will illustrate the future of the church as it shares in the earthly glory of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

After creation, man was established in a state of innocent bliss, with power to discern between good and evil, and a potential for righteousness. The advent of disobedience, sin, altered this potential to one of evil. Evil progressed in the heart of man until it was necessary to purge the earth by the deluge. God entered into a covenant with man, through Noah, committing to him the power of human government. Open idolatry developed from the time of Noah's failure, and it was necessary for God to make another covenant with man, this time through Abraham, in which He calls for an outward separation from both the people and condition of sin, and makes an unconditional promise that the people thus chosen would be a depository of divine truth and an inheritance through whom the Redeemer

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<sup>1</sup>The ensuing summary, unless otherwise notated, is based on Derby's The Hope Of The Church of God, in Connection With The Destiny of The Jews and The Nations, As Revealed in Prophecy, Col. Writ., Proph. Vol.I, pp. 420-582.



of men would come.<sup>1</sup>

All God's future relation with man had reference directly to Israel, as His chosen people. Inherent in the covenant with Abraham was both an unconditional promise of blessing to Israel, as His people, and a conditional promise by which some of the privileges of being "God's chosen people" depended upon their obedience to their God. The covenant established certain inalienable rights to Israel by which God honored them as His people.

To facilitate the perpetuation of their obedience, God renewed the covenant through Moses, promising the Mediator,<sup>2</sup> and, introduced the law as a means of assisting Israel in their righteous living. Continual and repeated iniquitous acts, both corporate and individual, became rampant in Israel, however, until as a final gesture of love, God offered His Son as the promised Redeemer.

Rejecting Christ, Israel became finally disobedient to the conditional provisions of the covenant, and God has set her aside, as to the covenant,<sup>3</sup> and has presented the Church to Christ: a church composed of a believing remnant of Israel and of Gentiles.<sup>4</sup>

In the place of the "chosen people of God," Israel, the Church becomes a "redeemed people of God." All that belongs to Christ will belong to the church, for the union of Christ and the church is complete and

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Principles Displayed in the Ways of God Compared With His Ultimate Dealings, Col. Writ., Proph. Vol. II, p. 592.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Covenants, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. I, pp. 77-86.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on the Pamphlet of Mr. F. Oliver, Entitled, "An Essay on the Kingdom of God, Followed by a Rapid Examination of the Views of John Darby," Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 448.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, Discipline and Unity, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 396.

absolute. The church has been bought by His redemption, sealed by the Holy Spirit, placed in the world as a witness to His grace, and awaits His return to receive her in power and glory.<sup>1</sup> Its hope is Christ's return to receive her to himself.<sup>2</sup>

Clothed with the beauty and glory which belongs to her, seeing in her Lord the beauty and glory of the Father, she is moreover associated with the glory of the Bridegroom in the power of that love wherewith He loved her, and in which He gave himself for her, that she might be perfectly cleansed and made glorious with Him, even where He is; then manifested in glory, surrounded with honors such as He receives himself; made partaker of all His glory, of that glory which the Father gave Him, that the world might know that the Father loved her, as He loved her.<sup>3</sup> (Italics not in original)

The promises to Israel through Abraham were both temporal and spiritual, given to the "seed of Abraham." (Genesis 15:18). Christ has been made the seed of Abraham<sup>4</sup> and the spiritual promises given unto Israel are transferred, through Him, to the Church, hence, she will share all glory and honor with Him.<sup>5</sup> ". . . the church has title to the inheritance, that is, to all Christ Himself has created as God,"<sup>6</sup> but it does not now possess it, having only "the spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Purpose of God, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Is the Coming of Christ For His Saints the Proper Hope of the Church, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The Purpose of God, p. 416.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, p. 192; "Now to Abraham and his seed, were the promises made. He saith not, And to seed, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. . . . And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:16,29)

<sup>5</sup>Darby, Principles Displayed in the Ways of God, p. 597.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 573.

<sup>7</sup>Ephesians 1:14.



The rejection of the natural seed of Abraham, Israel, gave occasion to the introduction of the spiritual seed, the church, into the heavenly places as joint-heirs with Christ.<sup>1</sup> This introduction has been accomplished only through the redemption by Christ, and it is as risen that Christ, having inherited "all things" through His sacrificial death, enters into the possession of His inheritance in heaven with the church.

His resurrection has assured Him that He will receive the "sure mercies of David" (Acts 13:34) and confirms his title to receive the promises made to Israel. He has returned to heaven to "take possession of the heavenly places in order to establish the kingdom of heaven;"<sup>2</sup> hence, a double work is going on: Christ, in heaven, preparing a heavenly habitation and glory for His church, who, on earth, is being "called out" to be His Bride.<sup>3</sup>

While the ultimate glories which the church will share with Christ are heavenly, its earthly glory is not to be minimized. Christ, at the Father's right hand, awaits the completion of His church, when He will return to the earth where all "foe will be made His footstool"<sup>4</sup> and "every tongue shall confess that He is Lord."<sup>5</sup> All earth shall be made to bow at His feet in tribute of praise and glory. It will be an earthly glory, for,

. . . it is this earth that we inhabit that God has taken to make the scene for the manifestation of His character and His works of grace. This earth is the place where sin has entered and fixed its residence; it is here that Satan has displayed his energy for evil; it is here that the Son of God has been in humiliation, has died, and has risen; it is upon this earth that sin and grace have both

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Purpose of God, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Substance of a Lecture on Prophecy, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup>Hebrews 10:13.

<sup>5</sup>Romans 14:11.

done their wonders; it is upon this earth that sin has abounded; if, notwithstanding, grace has much more abounded. If Christ is hid in the heavens, it is upon this earth He will be revealed; it is here that the angles have best penetrated the depths of the love of God; it is here, also, that they will comprehend its results, manifested in glory; upon this earth, where the Son of man has been in humiliation, the Son of man shall be glorified.<sup>1</sup>

Promise of this earthly glory is abundant in the Scripture.

Colossians 3:4 pledges, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." John 14:3 promises, "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also," and 1 Corinthians 15:51 asserts, "we shall not all sleep, but shall all be changed." This is the entrance of the church into its glory as taught by 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Events connected with this earthly glory begin with the resurrection of the church - the dead in Christ and the living saints - for it

links our hope to Christ . . . to the counsel of God in Christ; makes us understand that we are entirely set free in Him . . . it sustains our hopes . . . expresses our salvation . . . introduces us into a new creation, by which the power of God places us beyond the sphere of sin, of Satan, and of death.

. . . . .  
The virtue of resurrection embraces the life, the justification, the confidence, the glory of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, pp. 437-38.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 457, 460.



There is, moreover, a special resurrection of the Church.<sup>1</sup> The believing saints will be resurrected before the unbelieving dead, for, as a part of Christ's body they occupy a special place in God's plan, and are destined to share Christ's glory with Him.<sup>2</sup> "In the passages concerning the resurrection, not one speaks of a simultaneous rising of the just and unjust; and those which refer to the resurrection of the just speak of it as a thing distinct."<sup>3</sup> There will be a resurrection of both the just and unjust, but they will not take place at the same time, as is attested in 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52, where it distinctly states that only the "incorruptible" shall be raised; 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where the dead "in Christ" shall rise; Luke 14:14, which refers to the "resurrection of the just;" and, in Revelation 20:6 where there is a reference to participating in the "first resurrection."

The Holy Spirit is the distinctive element in this resurrection, for the just, the church, are resurrected to share Christ's glory, while the unjust, who remain in the unresurrected state, await judgement. The resurrection of the church is a unique aspect of God's plan, for, having been buried with Him by faith in baptism and regeneration, the church has already been resurrected, in God's mind, with Christ, and now awaits the time when it shall be resurrected in fact to be with Him. When He returns to receive His inheritance over the earth, the church, because it is one

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, The Two Resurrections, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. III, p. 559.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Notes on the Apocalypse, Col. Writ., Proph. Vol. II, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 463.

with Him, will be raised to receive His inheritance.<sup>1</sup> The unjust have no part in this resurrection for they will be raised, not for glory, but for judgement.<sup>2</sup>

At the coming of Christ, these /the church/ will rise as regards their bodies, by His Spirit that dwells in them. (Rev. viii.11) This is that resurrection - not of judgement, but of life (John v.29) - which belongs to the church in virtue of her union with Christ by the Holy Ghost. It cannot therefore concern the wicked; although they also must be raised up in their own time by the word of Christ, but to be judged. Those who belong to Christ will be raised at His coming; as for the rest of the dead, their resurrection will take place when Christ, after having delivered up the kingdom will be seated, as Son of man, on the great white throne, to judge the dead . . .<sup>3</sup>

The interval between the two resurrections cannot be dogmatically determined. The period is mentioned only in Revelation 20:4, 5 as a "thousand years." The uncertainty concerning the lapse of time, however, is altogether independent of the principle involved: the resurrection of the just, the church, occurs at the coming of Christ when the church will be raptured to reign with Him in glory,<sup>4</sup> while the unjust await judgement at the end of the church's reign of earthly glory.

This resurrection introduces the church to a new relation to Christ.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the rapture the church has only a theoretical relation of being risen with Him;<sup>6</sup> it has been in the process of being gathered. At this

<sup>1</sup>Darby, The Two Resurrections, p. 559.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Substance of a Lecture on Prophecy, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The Purpose of God, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant, Col. Writ., Proph. Vol. IV, pp. 233-35.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, The Two Resurrections, pp. 577-80.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, p. 197.



resurrection, however, it will be bodily and literally ushered into the immediate presence of Christ -- into a new relation of glory, with Christ literally as its Head. It will be united to Christ in the "marriage of the Bride to the Lamb."<sup>1</sup>

It is this distinctive fact which constitutes the hope of the church --- the final union of the church to Christ to share with Him all praise and tribute of His glory.<sup>2</sup> The church will become a partaker of His nature (2 Peter 1:4); will receive with Him the homage of all creation; will judge fallen angels and the apostate world; and, will be the "servants and instruments who will dispense the light and blessings of His kingdom over an earth delivered of all its sorrows, and where Satan is no longer."<sup>3</sup>

This new relation of glory will be established when Christ returns for His church.<sup>4</sup> The dead in Christ and the living saints will be caught up "to ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). "The church goes to join the Lord in the heavenly places . . . /where/ salvation will be consummated in the seat of glory itself, from whence she will return with the Lord in glory and power."<sup>5</sup> This does not constitute a return to the earth by Christ, but merely an "appearing" for His church, that, having received its inheritance of glory through its heirship as the body of Christ,

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Notes on the Revelation, Col. Writ., Pro. Vol. II, p. 379.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, The Church, What Is Her Power, Hope, Present Position and Occupation, Col. Writ., Evan. Vol. I, p. 570.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, The Purpose of God, pp. 416-17.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, p. 193.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, Notes on the Revelation, p. 379.

it may return with Him when he comes to the earth to appear visibly and personally before all men.

When the church is translated into the "heavenly places" to receive its inheritance through Christ, Satan will be dispossessed and cast down to the earth "having great wrath because he knoweth he hath but a short time." Power will be established in heaven according to the purpose of God, but evil will grow rampant upon the earth under the Anti-Christ, who, inspired by Satan, will enter into a civil-ecclesiastical government with the Jews, and a time of great tribulation will follow. Christ, returning with His glorified church, will put down the AntiChrist; Satan shall be bound; and a remnant of Israel will be established again under the unconditional promise of the covenant with Abraham. Christ shall establish His perfect reign over the earth, taking over the government established by the AntiChrist. At the end of a "thousand years" Satan will be loosed for "a little season," and, deceiving the nations, will cause them to rebel against the rule of Christ. He will be cast into the lake of fire; the unjust will be resurrected for judgement; after which the advent of the new heaven and new earth will begin.<sup>1</sup>

When Christ returns to the earth with His church, His object of judgement will be the rejection of His love by men,<sup>2</sup> and the renewal of

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Thoughts on the Revelation, Col. Writ., Expository Vol. II, pp. 474-612; Lecture on the Second Coming of Christ, Col. Writ., Proph. Vol. IV, pp. 384, 466-512; The Hopes of the Church, pp. 574-80; Notes on Revelation, pp. 375-84; Synopsis of the Bible, Vol. V (Revelation); Notes on the Apocalypse, pp. 1-165.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 435.



the covenant with Israel. <sup>1</sup>

Once the gospel has run its course, Christ will demand righteous judgement against the world. It is no longer Christ, at the right hand of the Father, sending down the Holy Ghost to gather together His co-heirs; but Christ calling for righteousness and asking it . . . against proud and violent men.<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of this devastating judgement, however, the church is securely united to Christ in His glory. Its place is to be with Christ, to enjoy the intimacy of His love and care, and to be protected from all danger by His presence. No harm will effect it, for it is wedded to Christ as His Bride, and will receive the deference and respect of the world which is due its position.

"The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee . . ."  
Zachariah 14:5b; when He shall have presented His spouse to Himself, a glorious church, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing," in her own beauty and glory that is proper to herself, seeing in her the beauty and glory of the Father, and with Him in His own glory, and in the power of the love in which He has loved her, and given Himself for her, that she might be perfectly purified and glorious with Him where He is; and then brought forth in glory with honors such as His, the participator in all His glory, the glory given Him of the Father . . . to judge angels and the world; companions in all His glory, and the ministers and instruments of the light and blessings of His reign over a refreshed and solaced earth . . .<sup>3</sup>

The consequence of this return will be the acknowledgment of "every tongue" and "every knee" that He is the Lord supreme. Evil will cease, peace and true liberty will reign without interference, all God's promises will be fulfilled, His righteous demands satisfied, and Christ glorified. It will be a reign of glory -- and the church is to share it with Christ!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Lectures on the Second Coming, p. 460.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 511.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, p. 196.

<sup>4</sup>J.N. Darby, General Remarks on the Prophetic Word, Col. Writ., Expository Vol. II, p. 248.

The scope of this glory is limited only by the glory of Christ; a limit beyond human comprehension, for Christ shall receive all glory. The church will inherit the glory due to Christ as Creator, as heir to the promises to Abraham, and as the risen Lord. When he executes judgement over the iniquitous earth, the church will be His chief instrument of justice<sup>1</sup> (Revelation 19); when he reigns over the earth made righteous by His holiness, the church will share that holiness (Jude); when He receives the praise and tribute of "every knee" and "every tongue," the church as His Bride, will share His supremacy (Zachariah 14); when he executes judgement upon the unjust at the last resurrection, the church will share the vindication of His death; and, when He returns to the Father, having established the new heaven and new earth, He will usher the church into a new and everlasting glory -- to share His heavenly glory.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE HEAVENLY GLORY OF THE CHURCH

The glory which the church will share with Christ on the earth is purely transitory -- its ultimate hope of glory is with Christ in heaven. Gaining this glory will be but the realization of its true character, and its destiny to be united with Christ in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that its present character is earthly, as the witness of Christ on earth, but this is as to fact, not title. The church is in a transitory state, being gathered as the body of Christ, built up as the

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Lectures on the Second Coming, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, pp. 194-96.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Churches and the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. IV, p. 482.



habitation, but when it is complete, it will join Christ in heaven, clothed with the same glory as its Head.<sup>1</sup> As the earthly form of the body of Christ it is earthly in nature, but its true character is heavenly, and its ultimate destiny will be to realize, in fact, its heavenly character.<sup>2</sup>

The hope of the church is identified with, and founded on, the relationship in which it is placed as united to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven,<sup>3</sup> for He is the center of her existence.<sup>4</sup> It is not merely the hope of the individual, but of Christ's body - a corporate hope.<sup>5</sup> Even while on earth as a pilgrim, it is the Bride of Christ, theoretically seated with him in heaven,<sup>6</sup> and waiting to be with him actually in heaven. It will remain on the earth, with an earthly character, until all things are set right in His kingdom, but this is not its hope for ". . . her hope, as her actual association, is with the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, where she knows Him."<sup>7</sup>

Her assurance of a heavenly glory lies in her heavenly character. Established on earth as a "heavenly economy" to assure the continuance of Christ's ministry,<sup>8</sup> it has the "spirit of promise, which is the earnest

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, What Is the Church, Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. III, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on "The Church and the World," Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IV, p. 490.

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, The Coming of the Lord and the Translation of the Church, Col. Writ., Proph. Vol. IV, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup>J.N. Darby, Christ's Coming, Faith's Crowning, Col. Writ., Exp. Vol. VII, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup>Darby, Substance of a Lecture on Prophecy, p. 190.

<sup>7</sup>Darby, The Church, What Is It?, pp. 570-71.

<sup>8</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 572

of its inheritance, until the redemption of its purchased possession," and has the assurance that, when conformed to the image of Christ in heaven, it will receive its heavenly privileges.<sup>1</sup>

Initiation of its heavenly glory will begin at the "marriage of the Lamb,"<sup>2</sup> when it is caught up to be with Him. Salvation, which has been theoretically perfected in Christ, will be consummated by the union of Christ to His Bride<sup>3</sup> -- the body being made complete, and the habitation finally erected. At that moment, the church will enter its glory, its true character will be manifested,<sup>4</sup> and its theoretical position made factual.

The spiritual blessings in heavenly places which we enjoy even now in hope, and hindered in many ways, will be for us, in that day, things natural, our physical and normal state, so to speak.<sup>5</sup>

.....  
We shall be there with the Lord, ever with him; no interruption, no decay of joy, but rather ever increasing delight . . . We are with Him in that place, with Himself, and with Him in the joy, infinite joy, which He has in the Father's love, a love resting on Him as Son, but in His excellency as such, loved before the world was, and now the accomplisher of redemption.<sup>6</sup>

Two aspects of this heavenly glory are clearly discerned; as it relates to the kingdom on earth, and, to the powers of heaven.

When Christ returns to the earth after the "marriage" union with the church to vindicate His holiness over the earth, the church will

<sup>1</sup>Darby, Christ's Coming, Faith's Crowning, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 576.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Lectures on the Second Coming, p. 314.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, The Rapture of the Saints, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, pp. 436.

<sup>6</sup>J.N. Darby, The Hope of the Christian, Col. Writ., Practical Vol. I, p. 343.



return with Him in the joy of its heavenly glory.<sup>1</sup>

. . . the earth will not fail to feel the effect of it. "Wicked spirits in heavenly places," (see margin Eph. vi.12) whose place will be then filled by Christ and His church, will cease to be the continual and prolific causes of the misery of a world subjected to their power by sin. The Church, on the contrary, with Christ, reflecting the glory in which she participates, and enjoying the presence of Him who is at once to her its source and fulness, will beam upon the earth in blessing; and the nations of those who are saved will walk in her light. "Help meet for Him" in His glory, full of thoughts of her beloved, and enjoying His love, she will be the worthy and happy instrument of His blessings, whilst, in her condition, she will be the living demonstration of their success.<sup>2</sup>

When Christ returns to heaven in great glory and power, after His personal reign of righteousness over the earth, the church will return with Him in its heavenly glory to take its place at His side forever, and to share with Him the praise of the heavenly hosts. Two aspects of this heavenly glory are prominent: the church will share glory given to Christ; and it will contribute to His glory. Angels, principalities, and powers will be subjected to Him, and the church will share fully with Christ in the receipt of their praise.<sup>3</sup> It will contribute to the glory of Christ through its own praise to Him as its Head, through its love, obedience and fellowship with Him as the eternal object of His grace. It will "fill the heavenly places with its own joy . . ."<sup>4</sup> The height of this joy will be the consummation of the church's love to Christ in a complete and con-

<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Brief Remarks on the Work of the Rev. David Brown, D.D., Entitled, "Christ's Second Coming, Is It Pre-Millennial?" Col. Writ., Proph. Vol. IV, p. 566.

<sup>2</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 437.

<sup>3</sup>Darby, Divine Mercy in the Church, pp. 186-87.

<sup>4</sup>Darby, The Hopes of the Church, p. 580.

tinuing worship of Him for His sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> when, with all hindrance removed, the Bride offers herself completely to the Bridegroom.

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, On Worship, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. II, p. 181.



## CHAPTER VII

### AN EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION TO BRETHRENISM MADE BY DARBY'S DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

No examination of the contribution of Darby's doctrine of the Church can be complete without an evaluation of the doctrine itself. Determining the value of that contribution involves an evaluation of the accuracy with which he adhered to an orthodox exegesis of Scripture, and the consistency of the related aspects within his system, both as to doctrine and practice.

For the purpose of evaluation a summary is necessary. He taught that the church began on redemptive principles at Pentecost as the spiritual successors to Israel; that God established it as the body of Christ and His habitation, heavenly as to title but placed in the world as His earthly witness, where it awaits its final redemption. The church established by Christ is a spiritual entity, existing in Christ, into which the individual is brought as the body of Christ. It is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who, as its president, applies the gifts for ministry which Christ gives for the edification of His body, and exist independent of the authority of man, either in government or ministry.

What is known in present times as the church, as expressed in denominational systems, is not the true church of God, for, refusing to meet in the simplicity of His name, it is now in ruins; not merely corrupted, but utterly, hopelessly, quite irreparable. God has discarded the church, as He set Israel aside, and His testimony is borne in the world by the assembly, which has existed from the beginning, for it alone meets "in His name."

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<sup>1</sup>Numbers appearing in brackets in this chapter refer to the pages of this thesis on which the incidents or statements referred to are recorded. This will facilitate the ease with which the reader may be able to ascertain the accuracy of the evaluation.

The assembly bears witness to Christ's body, for its purpose in the world is to gather that body for presentation to Christ, who, when it is completed, will translate it into the "heavenly places" to receive its inheritance as joint-heirs with its Head, from whence it will return with great glory to the earth to be His instruments of administration during His millennial reign over the earth, at the conclusion of which it will return with Him to the Father's side where it will share His heavenly glory forever.

#### EVALUATION OF THE DOCTRINE

Contradictory aspects of doctrine and practice are plainly evident in his system. These aspects result in inconsistencies which tend to obscure the real basis of its teaching.

Most apparent of these inconsistencies result from his failure to maintain a clear distinction in terminology. He used the word "church" in three distinctively different ways, although he seldom differentiated between their meanings. In his earlier writings he applied "church" to Christendom in general, as in the ruin of the church, where it embraced every form of Christ's witness which met in any semblance of an ecclesiastical system. Later, the term was transferred to mean "assemblies" which, having existed from the beginning were rediscovered as the resource of the faithful amid the ruin of the church. Finally, in his prophetic writings, it is applied to the whole company of believers, who, irrespective of ecclesiastical affiliation, will have part in the Rapture, as distinguished from the Jewish remnant. Failing to maintain these distinctions, he used the terms interchangeably, and at times, inconsistently.



His insistence on the church as an entity existing in Christ apart from any relation to man involved him in a contradiction as to the nature of the church, for at the same time, he insisted that the church was in ruins. If, however, the church is in Christ, it cannot be in ruins, for to be so would mean that Christ was in ruins. If the church really is in ruins, it cannot exist apart from a relation to man who has ruined it. It can neither be in ruins, nor in Christ; furthermore, if it is visible, as he insists it is, its visibility cannot exist apart from its relation to man; hence, while existing through Christ and His redemption, the church is at the same time apprehended only as it exists in the relationship between God and man. Darby is correct in maintaining that the church is in Christ as an entity, as His Body, but he either overlooks or fails to apprehend that the only way this entity may be logically understood by finite reasoning is the relationship which exists between man and Christ, hence, in application, the church exists in that relationship. In this realization, Darby is either epistemologically undiscerning or perhaps deliberately evasive. X

He arrives at his "church in ruins" doctrine by extremely faulty reasoning. Wiping away the entire ecclesiastical structure, as well as the impact of ecclesiastical history, with the stroke of his pen, he substitutes the "assembly" as a refuge for the saints in the present day; an assembly which has existed from the beginning. This involves him in either a contradiction or an unresolved dilemma: either the church or the assembly has existed from the beginning, or they have existed together. If only the church was formed by Christ, the entrance of the assembly constitutes a new element in God's plan for His earthly witness. Either it was formed by Christ and has been inoperative until rediscovered by Darby and his

associates, or, it has existed side by side with the church through the centuries, or, it is an entirely new principle being brought into God's relation with His people. If it was formed with the church and has been active among those who have always met in Christ's name, though in the minority, or even if there have been a lapse of its existence until the rediscovery, it can appeal to the New Testament order of government, as Darby claims, and the basis of its existence can be verified. However, if this be the case, the dilemma of two entities existing must be explained. Why was the church established, which seemingly had the same purpose and function, before its ruin, as the assembly, if the assembly was to be God's order of witness? Nowhere in Darby's entire system does he resolve this dilemma.

No amount of manipulation of terms will justify the dilemma nor the contradiction which it establishes concerning the church and the assembly. If it be explained that the church and the assembly are the same thing, but evil having come into it, man must go back to the origin and begin again on "first principles," this may be admitted. However, it is not Darby's doctrine, for he staunchly maintains that the church is irremediably in ruins, and cannot be restored; that God has transferred his blessings to the assembly which does not have to be "built," "restored," or "established," since it has always existed along side the church. It may well be asked if Darby is not merely "playing with words," for, by changing the term "church" to that of "assembly" he escapes the charge of attempting to establish a new church, or even to reconstruct the old one, which is declared to be in ruins.



This leads to a further dilemma; if the church is in ruins, and the assembly has become the true body of Christ, meeting in His name, then all believers who do not so meet cannot be said to be meeting in the true assembly of God. Are they outside the body of Christ? If the answer is in the affirmative, then the body of Christ is restricted to a principle of church government, or lack of it, and the words of Scripture, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . ." (1 Corinthians 12:13) are denied. If the answer is negative, then the assembly does not have exclusive claim to be the visible manifestation of the body of Christ on earth, for it is inconceivable that a part of the body should exist apart from the earthly assembly of God.

Darby's use of the term involves an added contradiction. As he uses the term "church" to define the nature of Christ's body, he refers to that which exists in the mind of God as the bond of union between Christ and all believers, or as he would have it, the entity which is in Christ. When he refers to the "church in ruins," however, he refers only to the ecclesiastical systems into which believers have organized themselves. He may well deprecate these systems as going beyond the authority for organization allowed by Scripture, but when he asserts that this departure in government from the original order established in the primitive church causes the church to be so ruined that it denies the unity of the body of Christ and suppresses the activity of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the church ceases to be the representative of Christ on earth, he makes an unjustifiable transference of meaning and his conclusion must necessarily be false. His basic fallacy in this respect is equating the internal nature and unity of the church with its external organization.

Two principles are illustrated by this aspect of his doctrine: at times he seems to develop certain tendencies out of an expediency of circumstance;<sup>1</sup> and, he is handicapped by a dialectical process of thought.

The "church in ruins" is an example of this expediency, for his early writings reveal none of this thought. His first published work, The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ (Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 30), published from Dublin in 1828 is a singularly strong appeal to maintain the purity of the church. Even after he had withdrawn from the Established church, as an examination of his writings during the first days of Brethrenism will reveal, he shows no trace of a bitter denunciation against the church. This may be explained by the fact already established (31-34), that Brethrenism did not develop as a protest movement, but as a positive approach to a deep and abiding spiritual fellowship. Not until the period of expansion, when some of the first principles of the movement were being perverted, does reference to the ruined condition of the church appear in his system. As far as this research has been able to ascertain, the first printed reference occurred in 1840,<sup>2</sup> when he was working in Switzerland. It is natural to understand how such a doctrine could develop at a time when he was in a crusading spirit, for the appeal to fellowship in the "assembly"

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<sup>1</sup>The author does not wish to suggest either that this aspect of his doctrine developed solely from expediency, or that all of his doctrine of the church contained an element of expediency. He merely wishes to suggest that certain aspects may have so developed. For the principles behind such a suggestion the reader is referred to the division of this chapter where his personal contributions to the Brethren movement are evaluated.

<sup>2</sup>J.N. Darby, On Formation of Churches., Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 210 et seqq. First published in French, it was later translated into English under the title, Reflections on the Ruined Conditions of the Church; and On the Efforts Making (sic) by Churchmen and Dissenters to Restore It to Primitive Order.



inevitably would lead to a polemic against the "church."

This appears to be supported by his exchange of tracts with Auguste Rochat and Francois Olivier,<sup>1</sup> in which he strikes out at the church. However, it is evident that before this exchange, he ministered among the members of the Dissenting churches, receiving without distinction members of the National church as well,<sup>2</sup> and does not seem at first to have pressed his thought of the ruined condition of the church. Whether this was due to strategy, as Neatby seems to suggest,<sup>3</sup> cannot be determined at this point; but this does not detract from the fact that at the beginning he made no charge against the ruined church, although, of course, he felt the present order of the church to be wrong.

Other aspects of his doctrine seem to suggest a development through expediency. The extremes in the view of open ministry were developed by Darby and seem first to appear just before his controversy with Newton at Plymouth. It does not seem to have existed in Brethrenism as a stated belief prior to this time. Groves realization of the liberty of ministry (30) was not for an unrestricted ministry, but merely the lack of scriptural ground to require ordination. S.P. Tregelles describes the principles observed from the beginning at Plymouth, and since Darby was one of the founders of the Plymouth gathering, he must have agreed to these principles. "Stated ministry, but not exclusive ministry, has been the principle on which we

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<sup>1</sup>J.N. Darby, Remarks on the State of the Church, in Answer to the Pamphlet of Mr. Rochat, Entitled, "A Thread to Help the Simple to Find Their Way., Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 257 et seqq.; Remarks on the Pamphlet of Mr. Olivier, Entitled, "An Essay on the Kingdom of God, Followed by a Rapid Examination of the Views of Mr. John Darby," Col. Writ., Ecc. Vol. I, p. 426 et seqq.

<sup>2</sup>W. Blair Neatby, The History of the Plymouth Brethren (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), p. 79.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

have acted all along here . . . . By 'stated ministry' we mean that such and such persons are looked on as teachers, and one or more of them is expected to minister, and they are responsible for stirring up the gift that is in them; but this is not 'exclusive ministry' because there is an open door for others who may from time to time receive any gift, so that they too may exercise their gifts.<sup>1</sup>(Italics not in original) Darby's jealousy of authority (12, 16, 40) probably prompted him to turn against stated ministry, and the extreme views which he held on the liberty of ministry were the result of this attitude, though this is, of course, a matter of conjecture.

It may well be asked whether his thought on the unity of the body, as maintained by separation from evil, was not fostered by this same desire for personal authority, for by the simple expediency of declaring the "evil" to subvert the unity, he could maintain external uniformity of doctrine and practice among his followers.

It must be admitted, however, that Darby based all of these aspects of his doctrine on Scripture; but the question of whether doctrine arises from a careful exegesis of Scripture, or whether Scripture is used to support a doctrine otherwise formulated, poses a recurring dilemma concerning the thought of any man. It would be most unfair to Darby, especially in light of the marked degree to which he appeals to the Scriptures for support of his system, to charge him with deliberately using Scripture to

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<sup>1</sup>S.P. Tregelles, Three Letters to the Author of 'A Retrospect of Events That Have Taken Place Amongst the Brethren' (London: Houlston & Sons, 2nd. edition, 1894), pp. 8-9. The author is indebted to G.H. Lang, The Local Assembly (Walsham-le-Willows, Suffolk: the author, 4th. edition, enlarged, 1942), p. 41, for pointing out this statement in the works of Tregelles.



support a preconceived idea, or that he unconsciously allowed his honest exegesis to be influenced by such ideas, but in the interest of correctly evaluating his thought, the possibility of such an unconscious habit may well be suggested.

The extreme views in his doctrine of the church reflect the dialectical process of thought with which he approached the subject: the church is either in Christ or in the relation of man to Christ; it is either governed exactly as Christ intended it should be, or is irreparably in ruins; either visible or invisible; either earthly or heavenly; either church or assembly -- there is no room for a synthesis of these antitheses.

This dialectical aspect is reflected, in a large degree, in his view of the unity of the church, for he failed to realize that unity is not necessarily uniformity. He viewed the unity of the body, while existing theoretically in the Holy Spirit, as reflected practically in complete agreement of doctrine and practice. Any deviation from the established principles constituted a denial of the unity and called for disciplinary action. He failed to realize that the unity of the body is maintained by the unity of the Spirit practically as well as theoretically, and this apart from any effort of man. Unanimity of doctrine is not a requirement for the maintenance of the unity of the Spirit. X

He will find little support in appealing to the Scriptures to confirm his view of the practical application of the unity of the body for it is evident that no uniformity of doctrine and practice existed in the primitive church. The mixture of Jewish and Gentile elements resulted in various practices in ecclesiastical order and usage: churches with Judaistic influences observing days, and for a time clinging to the ceremonial laws,

while the Gentile churches adhered more closely to the apostolic commands. Furthermore, it is evident from 1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 11:2, 23, 34; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6 that there was no clearly defined catalogue of conduct, written down and universally ascribed to by all churches, although oral and written instructions given by the apostles to one church were not at variance with those given to another. Differences must be admitted for it was necessary for the apostles to rebuke some churches while commending others, yet there was no question of subverting the unity of the whole body of Christ, nor of excommunicating entire churches.

Darby's doctrine of government and office in the church contains much with which accepted scholars will agree (146 fn), although where they restrict such principles to the very earliest period of the church, and admit a gradual development during the apostolic period, Darby equates it with the whole period and views the development as subverting Christ's arrangement for His church.

He admits that there was an authority established in the church while it was among the Jewish influences in its earliest days, but that it was expunged by the teaching of the Apostle Paul (122-23). He admits that in the Pauline era there was an apostolic authority and government but that this ceased with the death of the apostles, and the church, no longer having apostolic authority, has lost all basis for the continuance of such government. He further admits that the apostle established qualifications for "office" within the church, but contends that none of this was supposed to continue when it was bereft of its apostolic authority.



The crucial point in evaluating Darby's premise is not whether the apostle established the basis of office, which he admits, (132) but whether he intended for there to be an arrangement of succession; whether Darby is justified, on the basis of Scripture, in concluding that authority in government should cease at the death of the apostles.

While attempting to exegete 1 Timothy 4:14<sup>1</sup> and 2 Timothy 1:6<sup>2</sup> as not establishing ordination, and therefore a succession of office, but as proving the principle that hands were laid on by the presbytery because a gift was evident, and as blessing the exercise of the gift,<sup>3</sup> he nevertheless, in principle at least, admits by this exegesis that the assembly gives tacit assent to the exercise of the gift. Timothy himself laid hands on others for he was admonished by Paul not to do so hastily (1 Timothy 5:22). Whether this laying on of hands, this act of recognition of the gift, and assent to its exercise, implied authority is debatable. Nevertheless, the church is admonished to submit itself unto the elders and those who have the oversight over them, and the elders were instructed to take the oversight over the assembly (1 Peter 5:1, 2, 5), all of which Darby would admit, explaining that the submission to the elders on the part of the assembly, and the taking of oversight on the part of the elders, was grounded in a moral authority, but never a legal one.

<sup>1</sup>"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands by the presbytery."

<sup>2</sup>"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."

<sup>3</sup>J.N. Darby, Reply to Judge Marshall's Tract on the Tenets of the Plymouth Brethren, Col. Writ., Doc. Vol. IX, p. 535.

While no dogmatic assertion can be made about the apostle's intention for the continuance of apostolic succession of office in the local church, since there appears to be neither prohibition of, nor command to, continue them, several salient facts may be adduced from the instructions of the New Testament.

The fact that Paul established overseers in each assembly seems to indicate the need for a continuance of them; this Darby admits. The fact that Paul gave definite instructions for the selecting of these officers points to a continuance of an office; this Darby will not admit, for he asserts that Paul established persons and not offices to which a person should be appointed or elected. However, an office does seem to be indicated in Acts 6:1-7 where the apostles were concerned about the fact of helpers, not the persons who were to help. It is further evident that some to whom the gift was given labored continuously "in word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17), seemingly occupying an office or position in which they were accepted as such. Furthermore, it seems pointless for a carefully detailed list of qualifications for elders and deacons to be given, as is indicated in 1 Timothy 3:1-12 and Titus 1:5-9, unless the office was thus constituted and was to be continued. If these qualifications apply only to individuals, whom the assembly is supposed to accept without election, there would be no need for such a standard, for the evidence of a "gift" or "charge" would be sufficient.

The functions of the elder and deacon seemingly point to an office which needs to be continued, as the duties incumbent on them seem to suggest. They are to guard the body of revealed truth from error (Titus 1:9),



to oversee the church (Acts 20:28; John 21:16; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2); and, to feed the church of God (Acts 20:28). They were ordained at first by the apostles (2 Timothy 1:6); then by Titus (Titus 1:5), as Darby will admit, though he substitutes "chose" for "ordain;" and it is safe to suppose, since the qualifications were communicated to the church (1 Timothy 3:1-12), that it was ostensibly for the purpose of continuing such a selection of persons to fill the office.

Darby's chief difficulty seems to be that he became involved in a system of false assumptions. His original premise that the church was in ruin naturally forced him to seek a reason for its corruption. He found this in the corrupted government of the church, which led to a rejection of all established government. This, in turn, seemingly forced his exegesis of many Scriptures. From such forced exegesis he became involved in further contradictions in order to be consistent.

He failed to understand that regular order, established through a system of regularly appointed men who show evidence of the call of God, does not necessarily mean a suppression of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church; that education and gifts are not always diametrically opposed; that separation is not an inevitable step toward restoration; that membership in an ecclesiastical body does not invariably exclude membership in Christ's body; and, that office is not the antithesis of gifts. At the same time, he suffered from a temptation common to all leaders: the temptation to be original, and this added to his already involved system.

Differences between doctrine and practice become increasingly apparent as one studies his writings. He taught that the only basis for admit-

tance to the Lord's Table should be the evidence of regeneration; yet he refused to break bread at Plymouth because of Newton's presence and action there (44), declaring the Table at Bethesda out of fellowship because it refused to censure all Newton's associates (59) and, decreeing that no assembly should receive any who associated with assemblies that had been declared out of fellowship (60); making agreement with his position a condition of fellowship at the Lord's Table. He taught that each assembly was independent in government and represented the whole body of Christ in its locality; yet, he established the London Central Meeting from which his decisions, and those of his associates, became binding in a universal discipline upon all assemblies in fellowship (63). He taught that believers should not withdraw from an assembly until it ceased to meet "in His name;" yet, he withdrew from Ebrington Street, Plymouth, because of principles which could not constitute a denial of "His name" (59). He taught that the assembly should act in the discipline of excommunication only when the evil would deny the unity of the body of Christ; yet, he excommunicated both individuals and entire assemblies for nothing more than disagreeing with him (65).

He taught that exclusive authority over an assembly was contrary to Scripture; yet, he attained an authority over Exclusive Brethrenism which has had few parallels in Protestantism. He taught that membership in anything other than the body of Christ was unscriptural; yet, he made admittance to the Lord's Table a condition of fellowship, and unconsciously established a membership in the assembly by restricting the Lord's Table to those who were known by the assembly to be doctrinally sound, according to their interpretation of sound doctrine. He taught that where two or three



are gathered together "in His name," the whole assembly of God for that locality existed; yet, in the Walworth-Sheffield discipline of 1864 (64), he said of Mr. Goodall, "I come to Sheffield; there he breaks bread and is -- in what? Not in the church of God on earth, for he is outside it in London, and there are not two churches of God on earth." (65). He taught that the Holy Spirit was the president of the assembly and its acts as such should be binding on other assemblies, yet he refused to accept the decisions of Ebrington Street (57), Bethesda (59), Sheffield (64), Abbott's Hill (71) and many others.

Yet, when all these glaring contradictions and inconsistencies are pointed out, there remains the core of Darby's doctrine of the church -- (singularly pure and heavenly.) The church is in Christ; it is His Body, His Life, He is its Head; it is the chief object of His love; He redeemed it by giving His life for it; He has given His Spirit to guide, comfort, sustain and love it. It is in the world as His witness, as His Body, as a projection of Himself; it has become heir of all the inheritance of heaven and earth; it has even been made joint-heir with Christ. It labors on earth for Christ, awaiting the time when He will translate it into its glory, where it will be forever with Him as His Bride -- during His millennial reign on earth as His helpers, and in heaven as the chief display of His grace, where angelic hosts will sing His praises because He redeemed the Church!

This majestic and lofty view of the church is distinctively Darby's for few other writers have been able to apprehend the heavenly nature of the church as clearly as he has done. Stripped of its extremities, this

doctrine is expressed in a manner which is uniquely pure, in spite of his incredibly bad style of writing. Darby thrills to the church! This will be revealed by even a casual comparison of his writings with those of most writers on ecclesiology, where the reader is conscious of an analysis of facts presented in the cold formality of an austere outline: objective and abstract. Darby, however, writes warmly of the church, without regard for logical continuity of thought, but as if he were merely transferring to paper the hallelujah responses of his soul as it acknowledges a communion with the Spirit. The reader is conscious of a subjective certainty that, as a part of the church, he is viewed as the primary object of Christ's love, the display to the world of His grace, the hope of His glory in the future, and the assurance that His work of redemption has not been in vain.

The tragedy of his presentation of the doctrine is that this pure and lofty view of the church sometimes lies obscurely beneath the extremes to which he carried it, and the temptation is to express it in terms of the tangents in which he often expressed himself. There is no doubt that these extreme views and tangents have crippled the genuine spiritual influences which his statement of it could have had. If it is true that he contributed little to the Dublin meeting in the origin of Brethrenism, it is equally certain that he contributed most to the Plymouth gathering. It is not mere conjecture that much of the spirit of genuine fellowship there resulted from his teaching concerning the church, and the party spirit of division and strife seems coincident with the introduction of the extremes into his system.



However, in estimating its value for practical application it must not be considered exclusively in its historical setting. There is much in it that the church of today needs. A restatement and re-emphasis of its basic premise, without the extremes, of the nature of the church, its place in the world, its need for full dependence upon the Holy Spirit in government and discipline, its place in the eschatological plan of God, and its eternal inheritance in heaven, will do much to reproduce the spirit of the fellowship of the primitive church in the church of today, which, though not in ruins, is disrupted by differences, dissipated in energy by divided purposes, lacking in power by hindrances to the Holy Spirit in its external structure, not fully conscious of its heavenly glory, and lacking in the Pentecostal effusion of power!

#### EVALUATION OF DARBY'S PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION TO BRETHRENISM<sup>1</sup>

Darby's contribution to the Brethren movement cannot be divorced from Darby, the man,<sup>2</sup> for much of its character and spirit has developed as the direct result of the personal magnetism of this man. His impact on the movement, for good or bad, is universally admitted; no man contributed more to it than did he.

Whatever may be said about his spirit in later life, one inevitable fact towers above all others; at the beginning his was the personification

<sup>1</sup>The reader is reminded that the term "Brethrenism", as used in this dissertation, refers primarily to the Exclusive Brethren group, to which Darby has made the largest contribution.

<sup>2</sup>The author does not propose to reconsider an evaluation of Darby as a man, which he has already done in Chapter One, but to point out the contribution to Brethrenism which his personal influence has made as distinguished from, but related to, the influence which his doctrine of the church has had on the movement.

of the saintly life. When he left the Established church he did so in a spirit of true humility, genuinely longing for a more spiritual fellowship. During the early days at Plymouth his spirit of unselfishness was an example of holy, loving fellowship and unity, contributing to the general atmosphere of a pure community in Christ. His personal magnetism, intellectual acumen, marked spiritual maturity, as well as his position as one of the leading organizers, placed him in a prominent place in Brethren circles. A transformation of character and purposes seems gradually to have taken place, and his loving, unselfish nature changed to personal ambition, leaving him with a dual personality in which he retained some of his early simplicity of soul but found an antagonistic and ambitious spirit to have been added.

His personal contribution can be traced only through the subsequent history of Brethrenism. Beginning as an effort to secure a spiritual fellowship where all men might gather under the theme of "The Blood of the Lamb and the Union of the Saints," irrespective of doctrinal differences and ecclesiastical views (36); tolerant of all differences of opinion; united on the principle of open ministry (but not unrestricted); and the privilege of all saints to break bread -- a movement repudiating all ecclesiastical pretension -- Brethrenism soon reached the point of claiming for itself the exclusive title of the church of God on earth, and arrogated to itself the right to treat all Christians outside its narrow fellowship as "outside the church of God on earth because outside of that which represents it."<sup>1</sup> Its fellowship was shattered by strife and controversy, its unity broken by

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<sup>1</sup>As attributed to Mr. Goodall in the Walworth-Sheffield discipline. Quoted from a letter by Darby to a Mr. Spurr, as quoted by Neatby, op. cit., p. 225.



theological disputes, and its Table denied to many merely on the ground of their friendships and associations. Responsibility for this melancholy spectacle lies almost wholly with Darby.<sup>1</sup>

His dominating spirit, most vividly demonstrated in his controversy with B.W. Newton, molded the character of Brethrenism and changed the principles upon which it was founded. His word became the law of discipline, withering out spiritual affections, fostering enmity and pride, changing allegiances, and introducing a spirit of party strife. His demands for strict adherence in doctrine and practice contracted the liberty of free and independent evaluation on the part of most of his followers, who often either feared or refused to use their power of discernment and blindly followed his lead. His unrelenting pursuit of his object caused bitterness among friends, disrupted close associations, and, in general, broke the pure ground of fellowship upon which the Brethren had met, making the atmosphere of controversy almost inseparable from the movement.

The extent to which this party spirit disrupted the purity of its fellowship is illustrated by W.H. Cole, who, after commenting on the loving fellowship which existed at the beginning (36), refers to the effect of the controversy.

This devastating work began soon after Mr. J.N. Darby's return from the continent in 1845. I was told that, when he left Plymouth for his mission there, he commended Mr. B.W.N. to the assembly as one qualified to lead on the saints in truth . . . and to watch over, and guide them in all spiritual matters. But when he returned he found him in a position of great influence, attracting to his teaching believers from various parts of England, many of whom took up their residence in Plymouth, to benefit by his teaching and that

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<sup>1</sup>The doctrine, spirit, <sup>and</sup> ~~new~~ practices of the Brethren of Darby's era should not be automatically attributed to the Brethren of today, for many modifying tendencies have tended to expunge some of his extreme views.

of others. What were the feelings this popularity stirred? It would not perhaps be difficult to suppose, but a personal attack was soon made, and the disastrous strife of the two great teachers, who then became rivals, broke up the peace of the assembly and almost stopped the progress of the work. . . . no account, gathered merely from pamphlets, could describe the distress of mind, the poignant sorrow and heart grief produced by Mr. D. as he ruthlessly pursued his course against his former friend. . . . I deeply regret to have to record that strifes, jealousies, wraths, factions, parties, works of the flesh, took the place, in great measure, of the fruit of the Spirit, and loving fellowship of the saints.<sup>1</sup> (*Italics not in original*)

His personal contributions were not totally adverse, however, for his own spirituality infused the system with a marked dependency upon the Bible and attracted many able men to the movement by making Brethrenism appealing to those who sought, as did the earliest Brethren, a more spiritual ground than they had already found. His lofty conception of the nature of the church, in a time of general apathy on the part of the Established church, caused many to turn to his position without discerning its extremes. However, at the same time, his dogmatic spirit and frequent controversies drove many able and sensitive men from the group.

He was undoubtedly the maker of Brethrenism as a system, for he gave it the impetus it needed for expansion. He systematized its doctrinal position, and through his own dynamic personality, intellectual capabilities, and social position, popularized the movement. His fearlessly crusading spirit, as well as his logical insight into spiritual matters, presaged and caused its rapid expansion, until in the space of but a few years, its testimony was internationally felt.

One can only imagine what the total impact of Brethrenism would have been had this man retained the spirit of humble service to the body

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<sup>1</sup>W.H. Cole, as quoted by G.H. Lang, op. cit., pp. 75-6.



of Christ which he exhibited in the mountains of county Wicklow (3) and had not introduced his theological extremes, nor exerted his personal despotism, but with equal zeal, had given to the world the fellowship and spiritual truth which was known at Dublin in the early days of Brethrenism.

#### CONTRIBUTION OF HIS DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH TO BRETHRENISM

A comparison of Darby's doctrine of the church with that which existed in the beginning of Brethrenism will reveal the measure of its contribution.

Brethrenism of the early days was singularly simple. Its two basic doctrinal premises concerned the nature of the Lord's Table, and the privilege of all believers to minister under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Table was viewed as the center of true Christian unity, as the heart of worship, as the privilege of all believers to partake whenever they came together "in His name," the only prerequisite being personal faith in Christ. Ministry, though not unrestricted and unorderly, was open to all who possessed the gift of God, completely void of any sanction of authority by man, and regulated by prayerful, humble, and loving consideration of those who ministered. It found practical reflection in stated ministry, as cited by Tregelles (187-88).

The unity of the body, as that cohesive factor which held their fellowship together, was spontaneously accepted as coming from the Holy Spirit. Discipline within the assembly was exercised under prayerful consideration of its total effect upon the individual and the body of Christ. Though there was an interchange of thought and fellowship, each local assembly re-

mained autonomously independent in government and discipline. Eschatologically, it looked for the imminent return of the Lord as its hope. Its fellowship was pure, allowing for human error, tolerant of differences of opinion, mindful of the interest of others, and united in a common cause. It desired an unpretentiously simple government to administer its functions, with dependency upon the Holy Spirit to direct its administration. There is no doubt that if this pure fellowship could have continued, (if it were possible that such a heavenly-minded fellowship could have been contained within an earthly frame) the impact of the "Brethren fellowship" upon the world would have been totally different.

The contributions of Darby's doctrine of the church to this movement have been both adverse and advantageous.

His emphasis on the nature of the church introduced an antagonistic spirit into its doctrinal standard. Reaction to the "church in ruins" aspect which he promulgated was dual; it produced an unconscious sense of enjoying God's favor on the part of the Brethren, although there were many, of course, who remained humbly grateful to God for the refuge of spiritual fellowship which they had found; and, it caused those who had strong church ties to react against any association, but who, longing for a genuine spiritual fellowship, might otherwise have sat at the Lord's Table with them. On the other hand, it was the decisive factor in opening "Brethren truth" to many. The ratio of what the movement accomplished because of this emphasis to what it might have realized without it can never be measured. Its impact on the spirit of Brethrenism, however, seems clear -- it added a crusading element, one around which its entire thought on government re-



volved. Every aspect and interpretation pointed back to the pinnacle of this new emphasis - the church is in ruins!

A protest element was introduced with this bold pronouncement, officially at least, for the first time. The emphasis on a pure fellowship of saints, gathering together to share a common interest in the cause of Christ, changed to a system based on a rigidly integrated mode of doctrine. Pure meditation and communion in spiritual matters was replaced, in part, by an activity and zeal for the cause. Getting believers to meet "in His name," as narrowly defined by a principle of church government, subverted what had been the passion of its originators - to provide a gathering where believers could meet "in His name" as defined by a principle of redemption and faith. The movement which had rejected all ecclesiastical pretensions was making its first step toward developing a pretension of its own.

The limits of fellowship were contracted far beyond the intention of its first leaders by Darby's definition of meeting "in His name." It is not supposed that the term originated with him, for certainly it expresses an apt description of the interest and purposes of the original impulses which brought the movement into being. Without a doubt, however, Darby injected a new definition into the term, for he changed the content of its meaning from a simple gathering with faith in Christ as personal Redeemer to a complex and involved system with qualifying and limiting boundaries so that it narrowed the body of Christ until only a restricted number of his adherents were included. In addition, it served to alienate the Brethren from other Christians who met in ecclesiastical systems.

His concept of the visibility of the church, forced and rigidly formulated, constituted a further digression from the 'first principles' of Brethrenism. This aspect of his thought may have arisen from the principle of expediency, as indicated earlier in this evaluation, for its practical purposes seem to have been the uniting of all local assemblies within a given locality into one church (104), though in theory he taught that they should be independent in government and worship. Whatever its origin may have been, however, it introduced a new concept into the thought of Brethrenism, for it set aside the practical independency of the local assembly and presaged the exacting disciplinary code of unity which was later fostered by Darby. Maintenance of the unity of the visible church became the consuming passion of Brethrenism, instead of the joy and fellowship of sharing the unity of the body of Christ.

Darby's prophetic utterances, particularly his teaching on the Secret Rapture,<sup>1</sup> tended to draw the Brethren out of the world and gave them an isolated, inclusive character. The imminent return of the Lord became the consuming 'hope' of the assembly, setting its attention on the future; causing it to lose its consciousness of its earthly setting, thus, abandoning its sense of responsibility as Christ's witness to the social, political, and cultural aspects of civilization. While no statement of such a tendency can, at this point, escape generalities, it may be safely surmised that Brethrenism has assumed this 'other-worldly' attitude more prominently than most other religious bodies. Darby was largely responsible for this.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The burden of proving that the origin of the Secret Rapture had its source in Darby's teaching falls outside the province of this research. The author is not convinced, on the basis of only a preliminary study, that it should be attributed to him. Thomas Croskery, Plymouth-Brethrenism: A Refu-



The result of his doctrine concerning the unity of the body, theoretically and practically, and his consequent use of the Lord's Table to maintain discipline, have already been evaluated, and are here only to be noted. In each instance he added to the interpretation in such a way as to subvert the original basis upon which the Brethren had met.

However, the contribution which his doctrine of the church has made to Brethrenism has not been totally adverse. Many of his extremes, though they must be deprecated as extremes, nevertheless emphasized the primary truth contained in the original basis of Brethrenism.

His strong emphasis on open ministry has emphasized the liberty of all believers to minister to the body of Christ. His lengthy polemics on government and office in the church created a consciousness for the need

tation of Its Principles and Doctrines (London and Belfast: William Mullan & Son, 1879), p. viii, suggests that it was "borrowed" from Pierre Lambert, a Jesuit priest, but he does not cite any sources. However, representative scholars of prophetic interpretation, such as Nathaniel West, ["History of the Pre-Millennial Doctrine," Premillennial Essays of the Prophetic Conference (Chicago: F.H. Revell, 1879), p. 332 et seqq./ and Charles Maitland, [The Apostle's School of Prophetic Interpretation, With Its History Down to the Present Times (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1849)] trace a pre-millenarian view from the earliest times of the primitive church, with a belief in various aspects of the first resurrection of the saints before the millennium, but neither of them, as completely and thoroughly as they have traced its history, reveal any trace of a belief in a secret rapture. Both of them show that pre-millennial scholars in general have interpreted the first resurrection to be synonymous with, not preceding, the personal return of the Lord to the earth.

The significant point, however, is not whether Darby originated the concept, but whether he introduced it into the thought of Brethrenism. This he appears to have done, for, as Alexander Reese points out, [The Approaching Advent, An Examination of the Teaching of J.N. Darby and His Followers (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Ltd., n.d.), p. xi/ this view was not shared by Tregelles, Newton or Muller. Whatever its origin, even among the Brethren, there is no doubt that Darby's pre-eminently strong prophetic emphasis ("... Darby made the study of prophecy the pivot of his work; and his delineations of millennial glory dazzled the minds of his hearers." Neatby, op. cit., p. 81.) popularized it until it became accepted as 'Brethren truth.'

of a spiritual ministry through gifts from Christ. His consistent apologetics on the presidency of the Spirit, while at times absolving individual responsibility and opening the way to unlicensed conduct, has at the same time made the Brethren conscious of a personal presence and power of the Spirit of God, indwelling them for a divine purpose. Though he restricted worship quite narrowly, his conception of adoration of and through Christ has channeled the affections of the Brethren into an avenue of worship which has made the Lord's Table central.

The Secret Rapture aspect of his eschatological thought, though introverting the outlook of the Brethren, has given it an inward hope by which it has been quickened in earnest expectation of the return of Christ, and this has led to a desire to be 'in readiness' for His coming - a consciousness of the need to maintain a purity of daily conduct. Unity of the assembly, as composed of redeemed only, has been maintained by his repeated assertions on membership in Christ, not in a church. Strict teaching on discipline, though he himself abused it, has tended to assure the purity of the assembly in the conduct of its members.

#### CONCLUSION

Darby's total contribution to Brethrenism, either adversely or advantageously, cannot be evaluated, however, by mere description.

Bereft of his dynamic power, his persuasive and forceful eloquence, his genuine love for Christ, his keen insight and intellectual acumen, Brethrenism would have lost much. His unfailing energy, indefatigable activity and unquenchable sensitiveness to what he believed to be error,



propelled the fortunes of Brethrenism forward. His earnest zeal for the cause of Christ, as he knew it, infused the system with a fire which inflamed the hearts of his followers. His logical mind, however influenced it may have been by subjective reflections and meditative contemplations, organized and systematized a core of doctrine which crystalized the purpose and destiny of the movement.<sup>1</sup> His Biblical emphasis, though characterized at times by forced exegesis, has given to the Brethren a marked and summarily unique unity of teaching and preaching, based simply and plainly on their interpretation of the Word of God.

In spite of extremes in doctrine and conduct, J.N. Derby has left to Brethrenism and 'the brethren of all creeds' a heritage<sup>2</sup> far greater than the system he constructed or the doctrinal emphasis he developed, for he has left to all discerning men an almost unmatched emphasis upon Christ, His Church, and their place in it!

<sup>1</sup>Even though his writings may not be said to be systematized by students of systematics, in his own style he brought together the fragmentary teachings of a group which, for all intent and purposes, were without a basic creed or dogma, and communicated them in such a way that they have had a pronounced influence in many circles of theological thought.

<sup>2</sup>His influence on 'fundamentalism,' especially in America, cannot be adequately evaluated, but only suggested. Alexander Reese, *op. cit.*, p. 310, traces an indirect line of his influence through Henry Moorehouse, who "became the man who moved the man who moved the world," (Hy Pickering, Chief Men Among the Brethren (London: Pickering and Inglis, 2nd. edition, n.d.), p. 168.) in his influence on D.L. Moody. Moody, in turn, fostered the Bible school movement which has served to instruct and propagate the 'fundamentals' throughout that land. It is certain that the influences which marked the compilation of the Scofield Bible, and its strong dispensational emphasis, can be traced back, in a large degree, to Derby and the Brethren.

His influence has not been localized, but has spread through many lands and into many circles. His teachings have changed the lives and destinies of the rich and the poor, the intelligent and the ignorant, the devout and the impious, the haughty and the humble. His doctrines have been reflected in theological circles far beyond the bounds of Brethrenism. (His impact upon men and conditions defies description!)

## THE LAST LETTER OF J.N. DARBY<sup>1</sup>

My beloved Brethren,

After years of communion in weakness, I have only bodily strength to write a few lines, more of affection than of ought else. I bear witness to the love, not only in the Lord ever faithful, but in my beloved brethren in all patience toward me; and how much more, then, from God, unfeignedly do I bear witness to it. Yet I can say, Christ has been my only object; thank God, my righteousness too.

I am not aware of anything to recall; little now to add. Hold fast to Christ; count on abundant grace in Him to reproduce Him in the power of the Father's love; and be watching and waiting for Christ. I have no more to add, but my unfeigned and thankful affection in Him.

J.N. Darby.

Said, and taken down later:

I do add, Let not John's ministry be forgotten in insisting on Paul's. One gives the dispensations in which the display is; the other that which is displayed.

I should particularly object to any attack being made on William Kelly.

J.N.D.

<sup>1</sup>As quoted by Napoleon Noel, The History of the Brethren (Denver: W.F. Knapp, 120 West Maple Avenue, 1936), Vol. I, p. 49.



## EPILOGUE

The author wishes to reiterate his desire for complete objectivity in this research. He has attempted to analyse and evaluate Darby's doctrine completely without rancour or bias. On points where he has disagreed with his thought or action, he has endeavoured to be as fair and unprejudiced as possible; while on the points at which he has agreed, he has consciously reserved his expression of them so as not to betray Darby's actual thought. He has abstained from presenting some of the sordid details of Brethren history or some of its extreme views, realizing that neither controversy nor extremities are an exclusive trait of the Brethren.

While he has surveyed the writings of a number of Darby's critics, he is not conscious that he has accepted a single statement as to his teaching which he has not found fully confirmed in his writings. He has followed Darby's thought closely, at times almost verbally, in an attempt to be fair and accurate. He would like to believe that any inconsistency of thought or statement arises from that which is inherent in Darby's system, and not in his presentation of it. He has given ample quotations, and has cited numerous references, to document in full his findings and to facilitate the ease with which the reader may further pursue the study.

The value of this research for the author has been immeasurable! He has been given a new consciousness of his personal redemption in Christ. His vision of the Church, its eternal destinies, its purpose in the world as the Body of Christ and the Habitation of God, as the witness of Christ, has been enlarged. He has been made aware of the absolute necessity of

ministering under the influence of the Holy Spirit through the gift which he has received from Christ.

Not the least of the value of this study has been the friendships which he has formed among 'the brethren,' whose simplicity and sincerity has been a challenge to his own soul.

Whatever the total impact of the work and thought of J.N. Darby has been to Brethrenism and to the world, the author wishes to make a personal acknowledgement -- through it, he has been led into a deeper walk with Christ.



## PREFACE TO BIBLIOGRAPHY

The accompanying list of books represents a selected bibliography of Darby's writings on the church, and of books, pamphlets, articles and tracts on the history of Brethrenism. The bibliography is divided into three sections: the writings of Darby on the church (which are, in turn, divided into Historical, Ecclesiological, and Eschatological); the history of Brethrenism; and sources related to Brethrenism.

The paucity of primary materials concerning Brethrenism, added to the fact that there is no known collection of materials that are in existence, makes research on the history of the movement difficult. In order that the effort which the author has expended in locating the materials contained in this study may not be lost, he has elected to include in this bibliography the sources from which they may be obtained, and these are indicated by the use of a symbol following each book. Where possible, the press-mark for library copies is included.

Key to the sources are indicated as:

- NCL - New College, Edinburgh.
- ULE - University Library, Edinburgh.
- NLS - National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- EPL - Edinburgh Public Library, Edinburgh.
- BML - British Museum Library, London.
- ELL - The Evangelical Library, London.
- MPL - Middlesborough Public Library, Middlesborough.
- BLO - Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- MFL - Manchester Free Library, Manchester.

In addition to the books listed here, the reader will find much material for doctrinal study on Brethrenism in the library of the late William Kelly, which is now housed in the Middlesborough Public Library, though it contains little concerning the historical aspect of the movement. Its 15,000 volumes contain a rich treasury for theological studies.

The author has not presumed upon the generosity of private collectors, who have so graciously allowed him access to their libraries, by publicly listing such information in this bibliography inasmuch as he has not obtained their permission to do so.

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For purposes of this study, a selected bibliography on the Church is divided into Historical, Ecclesiological, and Eschatological.)

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